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HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

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HISTORY

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BY H. A. TAINE.

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TRANSLATED BY

H. VAN LAUN,

ONE OF THE MASTERS AT THE EDINBURGH ACADEMY.

WITH A PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR.

VOL. I.

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1871.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

The translator has collated almost every passage mentioned by M. Taine, verified every quotation, and spared no pains to render this history of English literature worthy of its author and of its subject. A copious Index will be found at the end of the Second Volume.

H. van Laun.

October 1871.
The Academy, Edinburgh.

AVERTISSEMENT.

L'AUTEUR de cette traduction élégante et fidèle a pensé que je devais indiquer au lecteur l'objet que je me suis proposé en écrivant *l'histoire de la littérature anglaise;* le voici, en quelques mots.

Une nation vit vingt, trente siècles et davantage, et un homme ne vit que soixante ou soixante-dix ans. Cependant une nation ressemble beaucoup à un homme. Car, dans une carrière si longue et presque indéfinie, elle a aussi son caractère propre, son esprit et son âme, qui, visibles dès l'enfance, se développent d'époque en époque et manifestent le même fonds primitif depuis les origines jusqu'au déclin. Ceci est une vérité d'expérience, et quiconque a suivi l'histoire d'un peuple, celle des Grecs depuis Homère jusqu'aux Césars Byzantins, celle des Allemands depuis le poème des Niebelungen jusqu'à Goethe, celle des Français depuis les premières chansons de Geste et les plus anciens fabliaux jusqu'à Béranger et Alfred de Musset, ne peut s'empêcher de reconnaître une continuité aussi rigoureuse dans la vie d'un peuple que dans la vie d'un individu.

Maintenant, supposez un des cinq ou six grands individus qui ont joué le premier rôle sur la scène du monde, Alexandre, Napoléon, Newton, Dante; admettez que par un bonheur extraordinaire, nous ayons une quantité de peintures authentiques, intactes et fraîches, aquarelles, dessins, esquisses, grands portraits en pied, qui nous le représentent à tous les âges de sa vie, avec ses divers costumes, impressions et attitudes, avec tous ses alentours, notamment dans les principales actions qu'il a faites, et dans les plus fortes crises de son développement intérieur.

Voilà justement les documents que nous avons aujourd'hui pour connaître ce grand individu qu'on appelle une nation, surtout quand cette nation possède une littérature originale et complète. En effet chacune de ses œuvres littéraires est une peinture dans laquelle nous la contemplons. Et cette peinture nous est plus précieuse qu'un portrait physique, car elle est un portrait moral; le poème de Béowulf et les Contes de Cantorbéry, le théâtre de la Renaissance et de la Réforme,

les diverses lignées de prosateurs et de poètes qui se succèdent depuis Shakspeare et Bacon jusqu'à Tennyson, Dickens et Carlyle, nous présentent toutes les formes littéraires, toutes les figures poétiques, tous les tours de pensée, de sentiment et de style dans lesquels s'est complue l'âme de la nation anglaise ; on y suit les variations de ses préférences, et la persistance de ses instincts ; on y voit une personne qui subit l'action des circonstances et qui se transforme en vertu de sa nature, aussi bien que par l'effet de son passé ; mais on y découvre aussi une personne qui dure ; l'adulte ne fait qu' achever l'adolescent et l'enfant ; la vivante figure contemporaine garde encore les traits essentiels du plus ancien portrait. Parmi tous ces portraits, j'ai entrepris de recueillir les plus vifs et les plus exacts, de les ranger selon leur date et leur importance, de les relier et de les expliquer, en les commentant avec admiration et avec sympathie, mais aussi avec liberté et franchise ; car, s'il faut aimer son sujet, on ne doit flatter personne. Peut-être valait il mieux laisser ce soin aux gens de la maison ; ils diront qu'ils connaissent mieux le personnage, puisqu'ils sont de sa famille. Cela est vrai ; mais, à force de vivre avec quelqu'un, on ne remarque plus ses particularités. Au contraire un étranger a cet avantage que l'habitude ne l'a point émoussé ; involontairement il est frappé par les grands traits ; de cette façon il les remarque. C'est là toute mon excuse ; je la présente au lecteur anglais avec quelque confiance, parce que, si j'examine mes propres idées sur la France, j'en trouve plusieurs qui m'ont été fournies par des étrangers et notamment par des Anglais.

H. A. TAINE.

PARIS, *Octobre* 1871.

DEDICATION.

Even at the present day, the historian of Civilisation in Europe and in France is amongst us, at the head of those historical studies which he formerly encouraged so much. I myself have experienced his kindness, learned by his conversation, consulted his books, and profited by that intellectual and impartial breadth, that active and liberal sympathy, with which he receives the labours and thoughts of others, even when these ideas are not like his own. I consider it a duty and an honour to inscribe this work to M. Guizot.

H. A. Taine.

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INTRODUCTION.

The historian might place himself for a certain time, during several centuries or amongst a certain people, in the midst of the spirit of humanity. He might study, describe, relate all the events, the changes, the revolutions which took place in the inner-man; and when he had reached the end, he would possess a history of the civilisation of the nation and the period he selected.—GUIZOT, *Civilisation in Europe*, p. 25.

HISTORY has been revolutionised, within a hundred years in Germany, within sixty years in France, and that by the study of their literatures.

It was perceived that a work of literature is not a mere play of imagination, a solitary caprice of a heated brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners, a type of a certain kind of mind. It was concluded that one might retrace, from the monuments of literature, the style of man's feelings and thoughts for centuries back. The attempt was made, and it succeeded.

Pondering on these modes of feeling and thought, men decided that in them were embalmed facts of the highest kind. They saw that these facts bore reference to the most important occurrences, that they explained and were explained by them, that it was necessary thenceforth to give them a rank, and a most important rank, in history. This rank they have received, and from that moment history has undergone a complete change: in its subject-matter, its system, its machinery, the appreciation of laws and of causes. It is this change, as it has happened and must still happen, that we shall here endeavour to exhibit.

I.

What is your first remark on turning over the great, stiff leaves of a folio, the yellow sheets of a manuscript,—a poem, a code of laws, a declaration of faith? This, you say, was not created alone. It is but a mould, like a fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal, and behind the document there was a man. Why do you study the shell, except to represent to yourself the animal? So do you study the document only in order to know the man. The

shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clue to the entire and living existence. We must reach back to this existence, endeavour to re-create it. It is a mistake to study the document, as if it were isolated. This were to treat things like a simple pedant, to fall into the error of the bibliomaniac. Behind all, we have neither mythology nor languages, but only men, who arrange words and imagery according to the necessities of their organs and the original bent of their intellects. A dogma is nothing in itself; look at the people who have made it,—a portrait, for instance, of the sixteenth century, the stern and energetic face of an English archbishop or martyr. Nothing exists except through some individual man; it is this individual with whom we must become acquainted. When we have established the parentage of dogmas, or the classification of poems, or the progress of constitutions, or the modification of idioms, we have only cleared the soil: genuine history is brought into existence only when the historian begins to unravel, across the lapse of time, the living man, toiling, impassioned, entrenched in his customs, with his voice and features, his gestures and his dress, distinct and complete as he from whom we have just parted in the street. Let us endeavour, then, to annihilate as far as possible this great interval of time, which prevents us from seeing man with our eyes, with the eyes of our head. What have we under the fair glazed pages of a modern poem? A modern poet, who has studied and travelled, a man like Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, or Heine, in a black coat and gloves, welcomed by the ladies, and making every evening his fifty bows and his score of bon-mots in society, reading the papers in the morning, lodging as a rule on the second floor; not over gay, because he has nerves, and especially because, in this dense democracy where we choke one another, the discredit of the dignities of office has exaggerated his pretensions while increasing his importance, and because the refinement of his feelings in general disposes him somewhat to believe himself a deity. This is what we take note of under modern meditations or sonnets. Even so, under a tragedy of the seventeenth century we have a poet, like Racine for instance, elegant, staid, a courtier, a fine speaker, with a majestic wig and ribboned shoes, at heart a royalist and a Christian, 'having received the grace of God not to blush in any company, Kings nor Gospellers;' clever at entertaining the prince, and rendering for him into good French the 'old French of Amyot;' very respectful to the great, always 'knowing his place;' as assiduous and reserved at Marly as at Versailles, amidst the regular pleasures of a polished and fastidious nature, amidst the salutations, graces, airs, and fopperies of the braided lords, who rose early in the morning to obtain the promise of being appointed to some office in case of the death of the present holder, and amongst charming ladies who count their genealogies on their fingers in order to obtain the right of sitting down in the presence of the King or Queen. On that head consult St. Simon and the

engravings of Pérelle, as for the present age you have consulted Balzac and the water-colours of Eugène Lami. Similarly, when we read a Greek tragedy, our first care should be to realise to ourselves the Greeks, that is, the men who live half naked, in the gymnasia, or in the public squares, under a glowing sky, face to face with the most noble landscapes, bent on making their bodies nimble and strong, on conversing, discussing, voting, carrying on patriotic piracies, but for the rest lazy and temperate, with three urns for their furniture, two anchovies in a jar of oil for their food, waited on by slaves, so as to give them leisure to cultivate their understanding and exercise their limbs, with no desire beyond that of having the most beautiful town, the most beautiful processions, the most beautiful ideas, the most beautiful men. On this subject, a statue such as the Meleager, or the Theseus of the Parthenon, or still more, the sight of the Mediterranean, blue and lustrous as a silken tunic, and islands arising from it like masses of marble, and added to these, twenty select phrases from Plato and Aristophanes, will teach you much more than a multitude of dissertations and commentaries. And so again, in order to understand an Indian Purāna, begin by imagining to yourself the father of a family, who, 'having seen a son on his son's knees,' retires, according to the law, into solitude, with an axe and a pitcher, under a banana tree, by the river-side, talks no more, adds fast to fast, dwells naked between four fires, and under a fifth, the terrible sun, devouring and renewing without end all things living; who step by step, for weeks at a time, fixes his imagination upon the feet of Brahma, next upon his knee, next upon his thigh, next upon his navel, and so on, until, beneath the strain of this intense meditation, hallucinations begin to appear, until all the forms of existence, mingled and transformed the one with the other, quaver before a sight dazzled and giddy, until the motionless man, catching in his breath, with fixed gaze, beholds the universe vanishing like a smoke beyond the universal and void Being into which he aspires to be absorbed. To this end a voyage to India would be the best instructor; or for want of better, the accounts of travellers, books of geography, botany, ethnology, will serve their turn. In each case the search must be the same. A language, a legislation, a catechism, is never more than an abstract thing: the complete thing is the man who acts, the man corporeal and visible, who eats, walks, fights, labours. Leave on one side the theory and the mechanism of constitutions, religions and their systems, and try to see men in their workshops, in their offices, in their fields, with their sky and earth, their houses, their dress, cultivations, meals, as you do when, landing in England or Italy, you remark faces and motions, roads and inns, a citizen taking his walk, a workman drinking. Our great care should be to supply as much as possible the want of present, personal, direct, and sensible observation which we can no longer practise; for it is the only means of knowing men. Let us make the past present: in order to judge of

a thing, it must be before us; there is no experience in respect of what is absent. Doubtless this reconstruction is always incomplete; it can produce only incomplete judgments; but to that we must resign ourselves. It is better to have an imperfect knowledge than a futile or false one; and there is no other means of acquainting ourselves approximately with the events of other days, than to *see* approximately the men of other days.

This is the first step in history: it was made in Europe at the new birth of imagination, toward the close of the last century, by Lessing, Walter Scott; a little later in France, by Chateaubriand, Augustin Thierry, Michelet, and others. And now for the second step.

II.

When you consider with your eyes the visible man, what do you look for? The man invisible. The words which enter your ears, the gestures, the motions of his head, the clothes he wears, visible acts and deeds of every kind, are expressions merely; somewhat is revealed beneath them, and that is a soul. An inner man is concealed beneath the outer man; the second does but reveal the first. You look at his house, furniture, dress; and that in order to discover in them the marks of his habits and tastes, the degree of his refinement or rusticity, his extravagance or his economy, his stupidity or his cunning. You listen to his conversation, and you note the inflexions of his voice, the changes in his attitudes; and that in order to judge of his intensity, his self-forgetfulness or his gaiety, his energy or his constraint. You consider his writings, his artistic productions, his business transactions or political ventures; and that in order to measure the scope and limits of his intelligence, his inventiveness, his coolness, to find out the order, the description, the general force of his ideas, the mode in which he thinks and resolves. All these externals are but avenues converging to a centre; you enter them simply in order to reach that centre; and that centre is the genuine man, I mean that mass of faculties and feelings which are produced by the inner man. We have reached a new world, which is infinite, because every action which we see involves an infinite association of reasonings, emotions, sensations new and old, which have served to bring it to light, and which, like great rocks deep-seated in the ground, find in it their end and their level. This underworld is a new subject-matter, proper to the historian. If his critical education suffice, he can lay bare, under every detail of architecture, every stroke in a picture, every phrase in a writing, the special sensation whence detail, stroke, or phrase had issue; he is present at the drama which was enacted in the soul of artist or writer; the choice of a word, the brevity or length of a sentence, the nature of a metaphor, the accent of a verse, the development of an argument—everything is a symbol to him; while his eyes read the text, his soul and mind pursue the continuous development and the ever-changing succession of the emotions

and conceptions out of which the text has sprung: in short, he unveils a psychology. If you would observe this operation, consider the originator and model of contemporary culture, Goethe, who, before writing *Iphigenia*, employed day after day in designing the most finished statues, and who at last, his eyes filled with the noble forms of ancient scenery, his mind penetrated by the harmonious loveliness of antique life, succeeded in reproducing so exactly in himself the peculiarities of the Greek imagination, that he gives us almost the twin sister of the Antigone of Sophocles, and the goddesses of Phidias. This precise and proved interpretation of past sensations has given to history, in our days, a second birth; hardly anything of the sort was known to the preceding century. They thought men of every race and century were all but identical; the Greek, the barbarian, the Hindoo, the man of the Restoration, and the man of the eighteenth century, as if they had been turned out of a common mould; and all in conformity to a certain abstract conception, which served for the whole human race. They knew man, but not men; they had not penetrated to the soul; they had not seen the infinite diversity and marvellous complexity of souls; they did not know that the moral constitution of a people or an age is as particular and distinct as the physical structure of a family of plants or an order of animals. Now-a-days, history, like zoology, has found its anatomy; and whatever the branch of history to which you devote yourself, philology, linguistic lore, mythology, it is by these means you must strive to produce new fruit. Amid so many writers who, since the time of Herder, Ottfried Muller, and Goethe, have continued and still improve this great method, let the reader consider only two historians and two works, Carlyle's *Cromwell*, and Sainte-Beuve's *Port-Royal:* he will see with what justice, exactness, depth of insight, one may discover a soul beneath its actions and its works; how behind the old general, in place of a vulgar, hypocritical schemer, we recover a man travailing with the troubling reveries of a melancholic imagination, but with definite instincts and faculties, English to the core, strange and incomprehensible to one who has not studied the climate and the race; how, with about a hundred meagre letters and a score of mutilated speeches, one may follow him from his farm and team, to the general's tent and to the Protector's throne, in his transmutation and development, in his pricks of conscience and his political conclusions, until the machinery of his mind and actions becomes visible, and the inner tragedy, ever changing and renewed, which exercised this great, darkling soul, passes, like one of Shakspeare's, through the soul of the looker on. He will see (in the other case) how, behind the squabbles of the monastery, or the contumacies of nuns, one may find a great province of human psychology; how about fifty characters, that had been buried under the uniformity of a circumspect narrative, reappear in the light of day, each with its own specialty and its countless diversities; how, beneath theological disquisitions and monotonous sermons, one can

unearth the beatings of over-living hearts, the convulsions and apathies of monastic life, the unforeseen reassertions and wavy turmoil of nature, the inroads of surrounding worldliness, the intermittent victories of grace, with such a variety of overcloudings, that the most exhaustive description and the most elastic style can hardly gather the inexhaustible harvest, which the critic has caused to spring up on this abandoned field. And so it is throughout. Germany, with its genius so pliant, so liberal, so apt for transformation, so well calculated to reproduce the most remote and anomalous conditions of human thought; England, with its intellect so precise, so well calculated to grapple closely with moral questions, to render them exact by figures, weights and measures, geography, statistics, by quotation and by common sense; France, with her Parisian culture, with her drawing-room manners, with her untiring analysis of characters and actions, her irony so ready to hit upon a weakness, her finesse so practised in the discrimination of shades of thought;—all have worked the same soil, and one begins to understand that there is no region of history where it is not imperative to till this deep level, if one would see a serviceable harvest rise between the furrows.

This is the second step; we are in a fair way to its completion. It is the proper work of the contemporary critic. No one has done it so justly and grandly as Sainte-Beuve: in this respect we are all his pupils; his method renews, in our days, in books, and even in newspapers, every kind of literary, of philosophical and religious criticism. From it we must set out in order to begin the further development. I have more than once endeavoured to indicate this development; there is here, in my mind, a new path open to history, and I will try to describe it more in detail.

III.

When you have observed and noted in man one, two, three, then a multitude of sensations, does this suffice, or does your knowledge appear complete? Is a book of observations a psychology? It is no psychology, and here as elsewhere the search for causes must come after the collection of facts. No matter if the facts be physical or moral, they all have their causes; there is a cause for ambition, for courage, for truth, as there is for digestion, for muscular movement, for animal heat. Vice and virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar; and every complex phenomenon has its springs from other more simple phenomena on which it hangs. Let us then seek the simple phenomena for moral qualities, as we seek them for physical qualities; and let us take the first fact that presents itself: for example, religious music, that of a Protestant Church. There is an inner cause which has turned the spirit of the faithful toward these grave and monotonous melodies, a cause broader than its effect; I mean the general idea of the true, external worship which man owes to God. It is this which has

modelled the architecture of the temple, thrown down the statues, removed the pictures, destroyed the ornaments, curtailed the ceremonies, shut up the worshippers in high pews, which prevent them from seeing anything, and regulated the thousand details of decoration, posture, and the general surroundings. This itself comes from another more general cause, the idea of human conduct in all its comprehensiveness, internal and external, prayers, actions, dispositions of every kind by which man is kept face to face with God; it is this which has enthroned doctrine and grace, lowered the clergy, transformed the sacraments, suppressed various practices, and changed religion from a discipline to a morality. This second idea in its turn depends upon a third still more general, that of moral perfection, such as is met with in the perfect God, the unerring judge, the stern watcher of souls, before whom every soul is sinful, worthy of punishment, incapable of virtue or salvation, except by the crisis of conscience which He provokes, and the renewal of heart which He produces. That is the master idea, which consists in erecting duty into an absolute king of human life, and in prostrating all ideal models before a moral model. Here we track the root of man; for to explain this conception it is necessary to consider race itself, that is, the German, the Northman, the structure of his character and intelligence, his general processes of thought and feeling, the sluggishness and coldness of sensation which prevent his falling easily and headlong under the sway of pleasure, the bluntness of his taste, the irregularity and revolutions of his conception, which arrest in him the birth of fair dispositions and harmonious forms, the disdain of appearances, the desire of truth, the attachment to bare and abstract ideas, which develop in him conscience, at the expense of all else. There the search is at an end; we have arrived at a primitive disposition, at a trait proper to all sensations, to all the conceptions of a century or a race, at a particularity inseparable from all the motions of his intellect and his heart. Here lie the grand causes, for they are the universal and permanent causes, present at every moment and in every case, everywhere and always acting, indestructible, and in the end infallibly supreme, since the accidents which thwart them, being limited and partial, end by yielding to the dull and incessant repetition of their force; in such a manner that the general structure of things, and the grand features of events, are their work; and religions, philosophies, poetries, industries, the framework of society and of families, are in fact only the imprints stamped by their seal.

IV.

There is then a system in human sentiments and ideas; and this system has for its motive power certain general traits, certain marks of the intellect and the heart common to men of one race, age, or country. As in mineralogy the crystals, however diverse, spring from certain simple physical forms, so in history civilisations, however diverse, are

derived from certain simple spiritual forms. The one are explained by a primitive geometrical element, as the others are by a primitive psychological element. In order to master the classification of mineralogical systems, we must first consider a regular and general solid, its sides and angles, and observe in this the numberless transformations of which it is capable. So, if you would realise the system of historical varieties, consider first a human soul generally, with its two or three fundamental faculties, and in this compendium you will perceive the principal forms which it can present. After all, this kind of ideal picture, geometrical as well as psychological, is hardly complex, and one speedily sees the limits of the outline in which civilisations, like crystals, are constrained to exist.

What do we find, at first sight, in man? Images or representations of things, something, that is, which floats within him, exists for a time, is effaced, and returns again, after he has been looking upon a tree, an animal, any sensible object. This is the subject-matter, the development whereof is double, either speculative or practical, according as the representations resolve themselves into a *general conception* or an *active resolution*. Here we have the whole of man in an abridgment; and in this limited circle human diversities meet, sometimes in the womb of the primordial matter, sometimes in the twofold primordial development. However minute in their elements, they are enormous in the aggregate, and the least alteration in the factors produces vast alteration in the results. According as the representation is clear and as it were cut out by machinery or confused and faintly defined, according as it embraces a great or small number of the marks of the object, according as it is violent and accompanied by impulses, or quiet and surrounded by calm, all the operations and processes of the human machine are transformed. So, again, according as the ulterior development of the representation varies, the whole human development varies. If the general conception in which it results is a mere dry notation (in Chinese fashion), language becomes a sort of algebra, religion and poetry dwindle, philosophy is reduced to a kind of moral and practical common sense, science to a collection of formulas, classifications, utilitarian mnemonics, and the whole intellect takes a positive bent. If, on the contrary, the general representation in which the conception results is a poetical and figurative creation, a living symbol, as among the Aryan races, language becomes a sort of cloudy and coloured word-stage, in which every word is a person, poetry and religion assume a magnificent and inextinguishable grandeur, metaphysics are widely and subtly developed, without regard to positive applications; the whole intellect, in spite of the inevitable deviations and shortcomings of its effort, is smitten with the beautiful and the sublime, and conceives an ideal capable by its nobleness and its harmony of rallying round it the tenderness and enthusiasm of the human race. If, again, the general conception in which the representation results is poetical but not pre-

cise; if man arrives at it not by a continuous process, but by a quick intuition; if the original operation is not a regular development, but a violent explosion,—then, as with the Semitic races, metaphysics are absent, religion conceives God only as a king solitary and devouring, science cannot grow, the intellect is too rigid and complete to reproduce the delicate operations of nature, poetry can give birth only to vehement and grandiose exclamations, language cannot unfold the web of argument and of eloquence, man is reduced to a lyric enthusiasm, an unchecked passion, a fanatical and constrained action. In this interval between the particular representation and the universal conception are found the germs of the greatest human differences. Some races, as the classical, pass from the first to the second by a graduated scale of ideas, regularly arranged, and general by degrees; others, as the Germanic, traverse the same ground by leaps, without uniformity, after vague and prolonged groping. Some, like the Romans and English, halt at the first steps; others, like the Hindoos and Germans, mount to the last. If, again, after considering the passage from the representation to the idea, we consider that from the representation to the resolution, we find elementary differences of the like importance and the like order, according as the impression is sharp, as in southern climates, or dull, as in northern; according as it results in instant action, as among barbarians, or slowly, as in civilised nations; as it is capable or not of growth, inequality, persistence, and connections. The whole network of human passions, the chances of peace and public security, the sources of toil and action, spring from hence. Other primordial differences there are: their issues embrace an entire civilisation; and we may compare them to those algebraical formulas which, in a narrow limit, contain in advance the whole curve of which they form the law. Not that this law is always developed to its issue; there are perturbing forces; but when it is so, it is not that the law was false, but that its action was impeded. New elements become mingled with the old; great forces from without counteract the primitive. The race emigrates, like the Aryan, and the change of climate has altered in its case the whole economy, intelligence, and organisation of society. The people has been conquered, like the Saxon nation, and a new political structure has imposed on it customs, capacities, and inclinations which it had not. The nation has installed itself in the midst of a conquered people, downtrodden and threatening, like the ancient Spartans; and the necessity of living like troops in the field has violently distorted in an unique direction the whole moral and social constitution. In each case, the mechanism of human history is the same. One continually finds, as the original mainspring, some very general disposition of mind and soul, innate and appended by nature to the race, or acquired and produced by some circumstance acting upon the race. These mainsprings, once admitted, produce their effect gradually: I mean that after some centuries they bring the nation into a new condition, religious, literary,

social, economic; a new condition which, combined with their renewed effort, produces another condition, sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, and so forth; so that we may regard the whole progress of each distinct civilisation as the effect of a permanent force which, at every stage, varies its operation by modifying the circumstances of its action.

V.

Three different sources contribute to produce this elementary moral state—the *race*, the *surroundings*, and the *epoch*. What we call the race are the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him to the light, and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body. They vary with various peoples. There is a natural variety of men, as of oxen and horses, some brave and intelligent, some timid and dependent, some capable of superior conceptions and creations, some reduced to rudimentary ideas and inventions, some more specially fitted to special works, and gifted more richly with particular instincts, as we meet with species of dogs better favoured than others,—these for hunting, these for fighting, these for the chase, these again for house-dogs or shepherds' dogs. We have here a distinct force,—so distinct, that amidst the vast deviations which the other two motive forces produce in him, one can recognise it still; and a race, like the old Aryans, scattered from the Ganges as far as the Hebrides, settled in every clime, spread over every grade of civilisation, transformed by thirty centuries of revolutions, nevertheless manifests in its tongues, religions, literatures, philosophies, the community of blood and of intellect which to this day binds its offshoots together. Different as they are, their parentage is not obliterated; barbarism, culture and grafting, differences of sky and soil, fortunes good and bad, have laboured in vain: the great marks of the original model have remained, and we find again the two or three principal lineaments of the primitive imprint underneath the secondary imprints which time has stamped above them. There is nothing astonishing in this extraordinary tenacity. Although the vastness of the distance lets us but half perceive—and by a doubtful light—the origin of species,[1] the events of history sufficiently illumine the events anterior to history, to explain the almost immovable stedfastness of the primordial marks. When we meet with them, fifteen, twenty, thirty centuries before our era, in an Aryan, an Egyptian, a Chinese, they represent the work of several myriads of centuries. For as soon as an animal begins to exist, it has to reconcile itself with its surroundings; it breathes after a new fashion, renews itself, is differently affected according to the new changes in air, food, temperature. Different climate and situation bring it various needs, and consequently

[1] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*. Prosper Lucas, *de l'Hérédité*.

a different course of actions; and this, again, a different set of habits; and still again, a different set of aptitudes and instincts. Man, forced to accommodate himself to circumstances, contracts a temperament and a character corresponding to them; and his character, like his temperament, is so much more stable, as the external impression is made upon him by more numerous repetitions, and is transmitted to his progeny by a more ancient descent. So that at any moment we may consider the character of a people as an abridgment of all its preceding actions and sensations; that is, as a quantity and as a weight, not infinite,[1] since everything in nature is finite, but disproportioned to the rest, and almost impossible to lift, since every moment of an almost infinite past has contributed to increase it, and because, in order to raise the scale, one must place in the opposite scale a still greater number of actions and sensations. Such is the first and richest source of these master-faculties from which historical events take their rise; and one sees at the outset, that if it be powerful, it is because this is no simple spring, but a kind of lake, a deep reservoir wherein other springs have, for a multitude of centuries, discharged their several streams.

Having thus outlined the interior structure of a race, we must consider the surroundings in which it exists. For man is not alone in the world; nature surrounds him, and his fellow-men surround him; accidental and secondary tendencies come to place themselves on his primitive tendencies, and physical or social circumstances disturb or confirm the character committed to their charge. In course of time the climate has had its effect. Though we can follow but obscurely the Aryan peoples from their common fatherland to their final countries, we can yet assert that the profound differences which are manifest between the German races on the one side, and the Greek and Latin on the other arise for the most part from the difference between the countries in which they are settled: some in cold moist lands, deep in black marshy forests or on the shores of a wild ocean, caged in by melancholy or violent sensations, prone to drunkenness and gluttony, bent on a fighting, blood-spilling life; others, again, within a lovely landscape, on a bright and laughing sea-coast, enticed to navigation and commerce, exempt from gross cravings of the stomach, inclined from the beginning to social ways, to a settled organisation of the state, to feelings and dispositions such as develop the art of oratory, the talent for enjoyment, the inventions of science, letters, arts. Sometimes the state policy has been at work, as in the two Italian civilisations: the first wholly turned to action, conquest, government, legislation, by the original site of its city of refuge, by its border-land emporium, by an armed aristocracy, who, by inviting and drilling the strangers and the conquered, presently set face to face two hostile armies, having no escape from its internal discords and its greedy instincts but in systematic warfare; the other, shut

[1] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part iv. axiom.

out from unity and any great political ambition by the stability of its municipal character, the cosmopolitan condition of its pope, and the military intervention of neighbouring nations, directed the whole of its magnificent, harmonious bent towards the worship of pleasure and beauty. Sometimes the social conditions have impressed their mark, as eighteen centuries ago by Christianity, and twenty-five centuries ago by Buddhism, when around the Mediterranean, as in Hindoostan, the extreme results of Aryan conquest and civilisation induced an intolerable oppression, the subjugation of the individual, utter despair, a curse upon the world, with the development of metaphysics and myth, so that man in this dungeon of misery, feeling his heart softened, begot the idea of abnegation, charity, tender love, gentleness, humility, brotherly love—there, in a notion of universal nothingness, here under the Fatherhood of God. Look around you upon the regulating instincts and faculties implanted in a race—in short, the mood of intelligence in which it thinks and acts at the present time: you will discover most often the work of some one of these prolonged situations, these surrounding circumstances, persistent and gigantic pressures, brought to bear upon an aggregate of men who, singly and together, from generation to generation, are continually moulded and modelled by their action; in Spain, an eight-century crusade against the Mussulmans, protracted even beyond and until the exhaustion of the nation by the expulsion of the Moors, the spoliation of the Jews, the establishment of the Inquisition, the Catholic wars; in England, a political establishment of eight centuries, which keeps a man erect and respectful, in independence and obedience, and accustoms him to strive unitedly, under the authority of the law; in France, a Latin organisation, which, imposed first upon docile barbarians, then shattered in the universal crash, is reformed from within under a lurking conspiracy of the national instinct, is developed under hereditary kings, ends in a sort of egality-republic, centralised, administrative, under dynasties exposed to revolution. These are the most efficacious of the visible causes which mould the primitive man: they are to nations what education, career, condition, abode, are to individuals; and they seem to comprehend everything, since they comprehend all external powers which shape human matter, and by which the external acts on the internal.

There is yet a third rank of causes; for, with the forces within and without, there is the work which they have already produced together, and this work itself contributes to produce that which follows. Beside the permanent impulse and the given surroundings, there is the acquired momentum. When the national character and surrounding circumstances operate, it is not upon a *tabula rasa*, but on a ground on which marks are already impressed. According as one takes the ground at one moment or another, the imprint is different; and this is the cause that the total effect is different. Consider, for instance, two epochs of a literature or an art,—French tragedy under Corneille and

under Voltaire, the Greek drama under Æschylus and under Euripides, Italian painting under da Vinci and under Guido. Truly, at either of these two extreme points the general idea has not changed; it is always the same human type which is its subject of representation or painting; the mould of verse, the structure of the drama, the form of body has endured. But among several differences there is this, that the one artist is the précursor, the other the successor; the first has no model, the second has; the first sees objects face to face, the second sees them through the first; that many great branches of art are lost, many details are perfected, that simplicity and grandeur of impression have diminished, pleasing and refined forms have increased,—in short, that the first work has outlived the second. So it is with a people as with a plant; the same sap, under the same temperature, and in the same soil, produces, at different steps of its progressive development, different formations, buds, flowers, fruits, seed-vessels, in such a manner that the one which follows has always the first for its condition, and grows from its death. And if now you consider no longer a brief epoch, as our own time, but one of those wide intervals which embrace one or more centuries, like the middle ages, or our last classic age, the conclusion will be similar. A certain dominant idea has had sway; men, for two, for five hundred years, have taken to themselves a certain ideal model of man: in the middle ages, the knight and the monk; in our classic age, the courtier, the man who speaks well. This creative and universal idea is displayed over the whole field of action and thought; and after covering the world with its works, involuntarily systematic, it has faded, it has died away, and lo, a new idea springs up, destined to a like domination, and the like number of creations. And here remember that the second depends in part upon the first, and that the first, uniting its effect with those of national genius and surrounding circumstances, imposes on each new creation its bent and direction. The great historical currents are formed after this law—the long dominations of one intellectual pattern, or a master idea, such as the period of spontaneous creations called the Renaissance, or the period of oratorical models called the Classical Age, or the series of mystical compositions called the Alexandrian and Christian eras, or the series of mythological efflorescences which we meet with in the infancy of the German people, of the Indian and the Greek. Here as elsewhere we have but a mechanical problem; the total effect is a result, depending entirely on the magnitude and direction of the producing causes. The only difference which separates these moral problems from physical ones is, that the magnitude and direction cannot be valued or computed in the first as in the second. If a need or a faculty is a quantity, capable of degrees, like a pressure or a weight, this quantity is not measurable like the pressure or the weight. We cannot define it in an exact or approximative formula; we cannot have more, or give more, in respect of it, than a literary impression; we are limited to marking and quot-

ing the salient points by which it is manifested, and which indicate approximately and roughly the part of the scale which is its position. But though the means of notation are not the same in the moral and physical sciences, yet as in both the matter is the same, equally made up of forces, magnitudes, and directions, we may say that in both the final result is produced after the same method. It is great or small, as the fundamental forces are great or small and act more or less exactly in the same sense, according as the distinct effects of race, circumstance, and epoch combine to add the one to the other, or to annul one another. Thus are explained the long impotences and the brilliant triumphs which make their appearance irregularly and without visible cause in the life of a people; they are caused by internal concords or contrarieties. There was such a concord when in the seventeenth century the sociable character and the conversational aptitude, innate in France, encountered the drawing-room manners and the epoch of oratorical analysis; when in the nineteenth century the profound and elastic genius of Germany encountered the age of philosophical compositions and of cosmopolitan criticism. There was such a contrariety when in the seventeenth century the rude and lonely English genius tried blunderingly to adopt a novel politeness; when in the sixteenth century the lucid and prosaic French spirit tried vainly to cradle a living poetry. That hidden concord of creative forces produced the finished urbanity and the noble and regular literature under Louis XIV. and Bossuet, the grand metaphysics and broad critical sympathy of Hegel and Goethe. That hidden contrariety of creative forces produced the imperfect literature, the scandalous comedy, the abortive drama under Dryden and Wycherley, the vile Greek importations, the groping elaborate efforts, the scant half-graces under Ronsard and the Pleiad. So much we can say with confidence, that the unknown creations towards which the current of the centuries conducts us, will be raised up and regulated altogether by the three primordial forces; that if these forces could be measured and computed, one might deduce from them as from a formula the specialties of future civilisation; and that if, in spite of the evident crudeness of our notations, and the fundamental inexactness of our measures, we try now to form some idea of our general destiny, it is upon an examination of these forces that we must ground our prophecy. For in enumerating them, we traverse the complete circle of the agencies; and when we have considered race, circumstance, and epoch, which are the internal mainsprings, the external pressure, and the acquired momentum, we have exhausted not only the whole of the actual causes, but also the whole of the possible causes of motion.

VI.

It remains for us to examine how these causes, when applied to a nation or an age, produce their results. As a rivulet falling from a height spreads its streams, according to the depth of the descent, stage

after stage, until it reaches the lowest level of the soil, so the disposition of intellect or soul impressed on a people by race, circumstance, or epoch, spreads in different proportions and by regular descents, down the diverse orders of facts which make up its civilisation.[1] If we arrange the map of a country, starting from the watershed, we find that below this common point the streams are divided into five or six principal basins, then each of these into several secondary basins, and so on, until the whole country with its thousand details is included in the ramifications of this network. So, if we arrange the psychological map of the events and sensations of a human civilisation, we find first of all five or six well-defined provinces—religion, art, philosophy, the state, the family, the industries; then in each of these provinces natural departments; and in each of these, smaller territories, until we arrive at the numberless details of life such as may be observed within and around us every day. If now we examine and compare these diverse groups of facts, we find first of all that they are made up of parts, and that all have parts in common. Let us take first the three chief works of human intelligence—religion, art, philosophy. What is a philosophy but a conception of nature and its primordial causes, under the form of abstractions and formularies? What is there at the bottom of a religion or of an art but a conception of this same nature and of these same causes, under form of symbols more or less concise, and personages more or less marked; with this difference, that in the first we believe that they exist, in the second we believe that they do not exist? Let the reader consider a few of the great creations of the intelligence in India, Scandinavia, Persia, Rome, Greece, and he will see that, throughout, art is a kind of philosophy made sensible, religion a poem taken for true, philosophy an art and a religion dried up, and reduced to simple ideas. There is therefore, at the core of each of these three groups, a common element, the conception of the world and its principles; and if they differ among themselves, it is because each combines with the common, a distinct element: now the power of abstraction, again the power to personify and to believe, and finally the power to personify and not believe. Let us now take the two chief works of human association, the family and the state. What forms the state but a sentiment of obedience, by which the many unite under the authority of a chief? And what forms the family but the sentiment of obedience, by which wife and children act under the direction of a father and husband? The family is a natural state, primitive and restrained, as the state is an artificial family, ulterior and expanded; and amongst the differences arising from the number, origin, and condition of its members, we discover in the small society as in the great, a like dis-

[1] For this scale of co-ordinate effects, consult Renan, *Langues Sémitiques*, ch. i.; Mommsen, *Comparison between the Greek and Roman Civilisations*, ch. ii. vol. i. 3d ed.; Tocqueville, *Conséquences de la Démocratie en Amérique*, vol. iii.

position of the fundamental intelligence which assimilates and unites them. Now suppose that this element receives from circumstance, race, or epoch certain special marks, it is clear that all the groups into which it enters, will be modified proportionately. If the sentiment of obedience is merely fear,[1] you will find, as in most Oriental states, a brutal despotism, exaggerated punishment, oppression of the subject, servility of manners, insecurity of property, an impoverished production, the slavery of women, and the customs of the harem. If the sentiment of obedience has its root in the instinct of order, sociality, and honour, you will find, as in France, a perfect military organisation, a fine administrative hierarchy, a want of public spirit with occasional jerks of patriotism, ready docility of the subject with a revolutionary impatience, the cringing courtier with the counter-efforts of the genuine man, the refined sympathy between conversation and society on the one hand, and the worry at the fireside and among the family on the other, the equality of the married with the incompleteness of the married state, under the necessary constraint of the law. If, again, the sentiment of obedience has its root in the instinct of subordination and the idea of duty, you will find, as among the Germans, security and happiness in the household, a solid basis of domestic life, a tardy and incomplete development of society, an innate respect for established dignities, a superstitious reverence for the past, the keeping up of social inequalities, natural and habitual regard for the law. So in a race, according as the aptitude for general ideas varies, religion, art, and philosophy vary. If man is naturally inclined to the widest universal conceptions, and apt to disturb them at the same time by the nervous delicacy of his over-sensitive organisation, you will find, as in India, an astonishing abundance of gigantic religious creations, a glowing outgrowth of vast and transparent epic poems, a strange tangle of subtle and imaginative philosophies, all so well interwoven, and so penetrated with a common essence, as to be instantly recognised, by their breadth, their colouring, and their want of order, as the products of the same climate and the same intelligence. If, on the other hand, a man naturally staid and balanced in mind limits of his own accord the scope of his ideas, in order the better to define their form, you will find, as in Greece, a theology of artists and tale-tellers; distinctive gods, soon considered distinct from things, and transformed, almost at the outset, into recognised personages; the sentiment of universal unity all but effaced, and barely preserved in the vague notion of Destiny; a philosophy rather close and delicate than grand and systematic, confined to a lofty metaphysics,[2] but incomparable for logic, sophistry,

[1] Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois, Principes des trois gouvernements.*

[2] The Alexandrian philosophy had its birth from the West. The metaphysical notions of Aristotle are isolated; moreover, with him as with Plato, they are but a sketch. By way of contrast consider the systematic vigour of Plotinus, Proclus,

and morals; poetry and arts superior for clearness, spirit, scope, truth, and beauty to all that have ever been known. If, once more, man, reduced to narrow conceptions, and deprived of all speculative refinement, is at the same time altogether absorbed and straitened by practical occupations, you will find, as in Rome, rudimentary deities, mere hollow names, serving to designate the trivial details of agriculture, generation, household concerns, etiquettes in fact of marriage, of the farm, producing a mythology, a philosophy, a poetry, either worth nothing or borrowed. Here, as everywhere, the law of mutual dependence[1] comes into play. A civilisation forms a body, and its parts are connected with each other like the parts of an organic body. As in an animal, instincts, teeth, limbs, osseous structure, muscular envelope, are mutually connected, so that a change in one produces a corresponding change in the rest, and a clever naturalist can by a process of reasoning reconstruct out of a few fragments almost the whole body; even so in a civilisation, religion, philosophy, the organisation of the family, literature, the arts, make up a system in which every local change induces a general change, so that an experienced historian, studying some particular part of it, sees in advance and half predicts the character of the rest. There is nothing vague in this interdependence. In the living body the regulator is, first, its tendency to manifest a certain primary type; then its necessity for organs whereby to satisfy its wants, and for harmony with itself in order that it may live. In a civilisation, the regulator is the presence, in every great human creation, of a productive element, present also in other surrounding creations,—to wit, some faculty, aptitude, disposition, effective and discernible, which, being possessed of its proper character, introduces it into all the operations in which it assists, and, according to its variations, causes all the works in which it co-operates to vary also.

VII.

At this point we can obtain a glimpse of the principal features of human transformations, and begin to search for the general laws which regulate, not events only, but classes of events, not such and such religion or literature, but a group of literatures or religions. If, for instance, it were admitted that a religion is a metaphysical poem, accompanied by a belief; and remarking at the same time that there are certain epochs, races, and circumstances in which belief, the poetical and metaphysical faculty, are combined with an unwonted vigour; if we consider that Christianity and Buddhism were produced at periods of

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Schelling, and Hegel, or the admirable boldness of brahminical and buddhistic speculation.

[1] I have endeavoured on several occasions to give expression to this law, notably in the preface to *Essais de Critique et d'Histoire*.

grand productions, and amid such miseries as raised up the fanatics of the Cévennes; if we recognise, on the other hand, that primitive religions are born at the awakening of human reason, during the richest blossoming of human imagination, at a time of the fairest artlessness and the greatest credulity; if we consider, also, that Mohammedanism appeared with the dawning of poetic prose, and the conception of national unity, amongst a people destitute of science, at a period of sudden development of the intellect,—we might then conclude that a religion is born, declines, is reformed and transformed according as circumstances confirm and combine with more or less exactitude and force its three generative instincts; and we should understand why it is endemic in India, amidst imaginative, philosophic, eminently fanatic brains; why it blossomed forth so strangely and grandly in the middle ages, amidst an oppressive organisation, new tongues and literatures; why it was aroused in the sixteenth century with a new character and heroic enthusiasm, amid universal regeneration, and during the awakening of the German races; why it breaks out into eccentric sects amid the rude American democracy, and under the bureaucratic Russian despotism; why, in fine, it is spread, at the present day, over Europe in such different dimensions and such various characteristics, according to the differences of race and civilisation. And so for every kind of human production—for literature, music, the fine arts, philosophy, science, statecraft, industries, and the rest. Each of these has for its direct cause a moral disposition, or a combination of moral dispositions: the cause given, they appear; the cause withdrawn, they vanish: the weakness or intensity of the cause measures their weakness or intensity. They are bound up with their causes, as a physical phenomenon with its condition, as the dew with the fall of the variable temperature, as dilatation with heat. There are such dualities in the moral as in the physical world, as rigorously bound together, and as universally extended in the one as in the other. Whatever in the one case produces, alters, suppresses the first term, produces, alters, suppresses the second as a necessary consequence. Whatever lowers the temperature, deposits the dew. Whatever develops credulity side by side with poetical thoughts, engenders religion. Thus phenomena have been produced; thus they will be produced. As soon as we know the sufficient and necessary condition of one of these vast occurrences, our understanding grasps the future as well as the past. We can say with confidence in what circumstances it will reappear, foresee without rashness many portions of its future history, and sketch with care some features of its ulterior development."

VIII.

History is now upon, or perhaps almost upon this footing, that it must proceed after such a method of research. The question propounded now-a-days is of this kind. Given a literature, philosophy,

society, art, group of arts, what is the moral condition which produced it? what the conditions of race, epoch, circumstance, the most fitted to produce this moral condition? There is a distinct moral condition for each of these formations, and for each of their branches; one for art in general, one for each kind of art—for architecture, painting, sculpture, music, poetry; each has its special germ in the wide field of human psychology; each has its law, and it is by virtue of this law that we see it raised, by chance, as it seems, wholly alone, amid the miscarriage of its neighbours, like painting in Flanders and Holland in the seventeenth century, poetry in England in the sixteenth, music in Germany in the eighteenth. At this moment, and in these countries, the conditions have been fulfilled for one art, not for others, and a single branch has budded in the general barrenness. For these rules of human growth must history search; with the special psychology of each special formation it must occupy itself; the finished picture of these characteristic conditions it must now labour to compose. No task is more delicate or more difficult; Montesquieu tried it, but in his time history was too new to admit of his success; they had not yet even a suspicion of the road necessary to be travelled, and hardly now do we begin to catch sight of it. Just as in its elements astronomy is a mechanical and physiology a chemical problem, so history in its elements is a psychological problem. There is a particular inner system of impressions and operations which makes an artist, a believer, a musician, a painter, a wanderer, a man of society; and of each the affiliation, the depth, the independence of ideas and emotions, are different: each has its moral history and its special structure, with some governing disposition and some dominant feature. To explain each, it would be necessary to write a chapter of esoteric analysis, and barely yet has such a method been rudely sketched. One man alone, Stendhal, with a singular bent of mind and a singular education, has undertaken it, and to this day the majority of readers find his books paradoxical and obscure: his talent and his ideas were premature; his admirable divinations were not understood, any more than his profound sayings thrown out cursorily, or the astonishing justness of his perception and of his logic. It was not perceived that, under the exterior of a conversationalist and a man of the world, he explained the most complicated of esoteric mechanisms; that he laid his finger on the mainsprings; that he introduced into the history of the heart scientific processes, the art of notation, decomposition, deduction; that he first marked the fundamental causes of nationality, climate, temperament; in short, that he treated of sentiments as they should be treated,—in the manner of the naturalist, namely, and of the natural philosopher, who constructs classifications and weighs forces. For this very reason he was considered dry and eccentric: he remained solitary, writing novels, voyages, notes, for which he sought and obtained a score of readers. And yet we find in

his books at the present day essays the most suitable to open the path which I have endeavoured to describe. No one has better taught us how to open our eyes and see, to see first the men that surround us and the life that is present, then the ancient and authentic documents, to read between the black and white lines of the pages, to recognise under the old impression, under the scribbling of a text, the precise sentiment, the movement of ideas, the state of mind in which they were written. In his writings, in Sainte-Beuve, in the German critics, the reader will see all the wealth that may be drawn from a literary work: when the work is rich, and one knows how to interpret it, we find there the psychology of a soul, frequently of an age, now and then of a race. In this light, a great poem, a fine novel, the confessions of a superior man, are more instructive than a heap of historians with their histories. I would give fifty volumes of charters and a hundred volumes of state-papers for the memoirs of Cellini, the epistles of St. Paul, the Table-talk of Luther, or the comedies of Aristophanes. In this consists the importance of literary works: they are instructive because they are beautiful; their utility grows with their perfection; and if they furnish documents, it is because they are monuments. The more a book represents visible sentiments, the more it is a work of literature; for the proper office of literature is to take note of sentiments. The more a book represents important sentiments, the higher is its place in literature; for it is by representing the mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age, that a writer rallies round him the sympathies of an entire age and an entire nation. This is why, amid the writings which set before our eyes the sentiments of preceding generations, a literature, and notably a grand literature, is incomparably the best. It resembles that admirable apparatus of extraordinary sensibility, by which physicians disentangle and measure the most recondite and delicate changes of a body. Constitutions, religions, do not approach it in importance; the articles of a code and of a catechism only show us the spirit roughly and without delicacy. If there are any writings in which politics and dogma are full of life, it is in the eloquent discourses of the pulpit and the tribune, memoirs, unrestrained confessions; and all this belongs to literature: so that, in addition to itself, it has all the advantage of other works. It is then chiefly by the study of literatures that one may construct a moral history, and advance toward the knowledge of psychological laws, from which events spring.

I am about to write the history of a literature, and to seek in it for the psychology of a people: if I have chosen this one in particular, it is not without a reason. I had to find a people with a grand and complete literature, and this is rare: there are few nations who have, during their whole existence, really thought and written. Among the ancients, the Latin literature is worth nothing at the outset, then borrowed and imitative. Among the moderns, German literature is almost

wanting for two centuries.[1] Italian literature and Spanish literature end at the middle of the seventeenth century. Only ancient Greece, modern France and England, offer a complete series of great significant monuments. I have chosen England, because being yet alive, and subject to direct examination, it may be better studied than a destroyed civilisation, of which we retain but the scraps, and because, being different from France, it has in the eyes of a Frenchman a more distinct character. Besides, there is a peculiarity in this civilisation, that apart from its spontaneous development, it presents a forced deviation, it has suffered the last and most effectual of all conquests, and that the three grounds whence it has sprung, race, climate, the Norman invasion, may be observed in its remains with perfect exactness; so well, that we may examine in this history the two most powerful moving springs of human transformation, natural bent and constraining force, and we may examine them without uncertainty or gap, in a series of authentic and unmutilated memorials. I have endeavoured to define these primary springs, to exhibit their gradual effects, to explain how they have ended by bringing to light great political, religious, and literary works, and by developing the recondite mechanism whereby the Saxon barbarian has been transformed into the Englishman of to-day.

[1] From 1550 to 1750.

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BOOK I.

THE SOURCE.

CHAPTER I.

The Saxons.

I. The old country—Soil, sea, sky, climate—The new country—A moist land and a thankless soil—Influence of climate on character.

II. The bodily structure—Food—Manners—Uncultivated instincts, German and English.

III. Noble instincts in Germany—The individual—The family—The state—Religion—The Edda—Tragi-heroic conception of the world and of mankind.

IV. Noble instincts in England—Warrior and chieftain—Wife and husband—The poem of Beowulf—Barbarian society and the barbarian hero.

V. Pagan poems—Kind and force of sentiments—Bent of mind and speech—Force of impression; harshness of expression.

VI. Christian poems—Wherein the Saxons are predisposed to Christianity—How converted—Their view of Christianity—Hymns of Cædmon—Funeral hymn—Poem of Judith—Paraphrase of the Bible.

VII. Why Latin culture took no hold on the Saxons—Reasons drawn from the Saxon conquest—Bede, Alcuin, Alfred—Translations—Chronicles—Compilations—Impotence of Latin writers—Reasons drawn from the Saxon character—Adhelm—Alcuin—Latin verse—Poetic dialogues—Bad taste of the Latin writers.

VIII. Contrast of German and Latin races—Character of the Saxon race—Its endurance under the Norman conquest.

I.

AS you coast the North Sea from the Scheldt to Jutland, you will mark in the first place that the characteristic feature is the want of slope; marsh, waste, shoal; the rivers hardly drag themselves along, swollen and sluggish, with long, black-looking waves; the flooding stream oozes over the banks, and appears beyond them in stagnant pools. In Holland the soil is but a sediment of mud; here and there only does the earth cover it with a crust of mire, shallow and brittle, the mere alluvium of the river, which the river seems ever ready to

destroy. Thick mists hover above, being fed by ceaseless exhalations. They lazily turn their violet flanks, grow black, suddenly descend in heavy showers; the vapour, like a furnace-smoke, crawls for ever on the horizon. Thus watered, the plants multiply; in the angle between Jutland and the continent, in a fat muddy soil, 'the verdure is as fresh as that of England.'[1] Immense forests covered the land even after the eleventh century. The sap of this humid country, thick and potent, circulates in man as in the plants, and by its respiration, its nutrition, the sensations and habits which it generates, affects his faculties and his frame.

The land produced after this fashion has one enemy, to wit, the sea. Holland maintains its existence only by virtue of its dykes. In 1654 those in Jutland burst, and fifteen thousand of the inhabitants were swallowed up. One need see the blast of the North swirl down upon the low level of the soil, wan and ominous:[2] the vast yellow sea dashes against the narrow belt of coast which seems incapable of a moment's resistance; the wind howls and bellows; the sea-mews cry; the poor little ships flee as fast as they can, bending, almost overset, and endeavour to find a refuge in the mouth of the river, which seems as hostile as the sea. A sad and precarious existence, as it were face to face with a beast of prey. The Frisians, in their ancient laws, speak already of the league they have made against 'the ferocious ocean.' Even in a calm this sea is unsafe. 'Before the eye spreads a mighty waste of waters; above float the clouds, grey and shapeless daughters of the air, which draw up the water in their mist-buckets from the sea, carry it along laboriously, and again suffer it to fall into the sea, a sad, useless, wearisome task.'[3] 'With flat and long extended maw, the shapeless north wind, like a scolding dotard, babbles with groaning, mysterious voice, and repeats his foolish tales.' Rain, wind, and surge leave room for naught but gloomy and melancholy thoughts. The very joy of the billows has in it an inexplicable restlessness and harshness. From Holland to Jutland, a string of small, deluged islands[4] bears witness to their ravages; the shifting sands which the tide floats up

[1] Malte-Brun, iv. 398. Denmark means 'low plain.' Not counting bays, gulfs, and canals, the sixteenth part of the country is covered by water. The dialect of Jutland bears still a great resemblance to the English.

[2] See Ruysdaal's painting in Mr. Baring's collection. Of the three Saxon islands, North Strandt, Busen, and Heligoland, North Strandt was inundated by the sea in 1300, 1483, 1532, 1615, and almost destroyed in 1634. Busen is a level plain, beaten by storms, which it has been found necessary to surround by a dyke. Heligoland was laid waste by the sea in 800, 1300, 1500, 1649, the last time so violently that only a portion of it survived. Turner, *Hist. of Angl. Saxons*, 1852, i. 87.

[3] Heine, *die Nordsee*. Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* book 2, for the impressions of the Romans, 'truculentia cœli.'

[4] Watten, Platen, Sande, Düneninseln.

obstruct with rocks the banks and entrance of the rivers.[1] The first Roman fleet, a thousand vessels, perished there; to this day ships wait a month or more in sight of port, tossed upon the great white waves, not daring to risk themselves in the shifting, winding channel, notorious for its wrecks. In winter a breastplate of ice covers the two streams; the sea drives back the frozen masses as they descend; they pile themselves with a crash upon the sandbanks, and sway to and fro; now and then you may see a vessel, seized as in a vice, split in two beneath their violence. Picture, in this foggy clime, amid hoar-frost and storm, in these marshes and forests, half-naked savages, a kind of wild beasts, fishers and hunters, even hunters of men; these are they, Saxons, Angles, Jutes, Frisians;[2] later on, Danes, who during the fifth and the ninth centuries, with their swords and battle-axes, took and kept the island of Britain.

A rude and foggy land, like their own, except in the depth of its sea and the safety of its coasts, which one day will call up real fleets and mighty vessels; green England—the word rises to the lips and expresses all. Here also moisture pervades everything; even in summer the mist rises; even on clear days you perceive it fresh from the great sea-girdle, or rising from vast but ever slushy moorlands, undulating with hill and dale, intersected with hedges to the limit of the horizon. Here and there a sunbeam strikes on the higher foliage with burning flash, and the splendour of the verdure dazzles and almost blinds you. The overflowing water straightens the flabby stems; they grow up, rank, weak, and filled with sap; a sap ever renewed, for the grey mists creep over a stratum of motionless vapour, and at distant intervals the rim of heaven is drenched by heavy showers. 'There are yet commons as at the time of the Conquest, deserted, abandoned,[3] wild, covered with furze and thorny plants, with here and there a horse grazing in the solitude. Joyless scene, poverty-stricken soil![4] What a labour it has been to humanise it! What impression it must have made on the men of the South, the Romans of Cæsar! I thought, when I saw it, of the ancient Saxons, wanderers from West and North, who came to settle in this land of marsh and fogs, on the border of these primeval forests, on the banks of these great muddy streams, which roll down their slime to meet the waves.[5] They must have lived as hunters and swineherds; grow, as before, brawny, fierce, gloomy. Take civilisation from this soil, and there will remain to the inhabit-

[1] Nine or ten miles out, near Heligoland, are the nearest soundings of about fifty fathoms.

[2] Palgrave, *Saxon Commonwealth*, vol. i.

[3] *Notes of a Journey in England.*

[4] Léonce de Lavergne, *De l'Agriculture anglaise.* 'The soil is much worse than that of France.'

[5] There are at least four rivers in England passing by the name of 'Ouse,' which is only another form of 'ooze.'—TR.

ants only war, the chase, gluttony, drunkenness. Smiling love, sweet poetic dreams, art, refined and nimble thought, are for the happy shores of the Mediterranean. Here the barbarian, ill housed in his mud-hovel, who hears the rain rustling whole days in the oak leaves—what dreams can he have, gazing upon his mud-pools and his sombre sky?'

II.

Huge white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes, reddish flaxen hair; ravenous stomachs, filled with meat and cheese, heated by strong drinks; of a cold temperament, slow to love,[1] home-stayers, prone to brutal drunkenness: these are to this day the features which descent and climate preserve in the race, and these are what the Roman historians discovered in their former country. There is no living, in these lands, without abundance of solid food; bad weather keeps people at home; strong drinks are necessary to cheer them; the senses become blunted, the muscles are braced, the will vigorous. In every country the body of man is rooted deep into the soil of nature; and in this instance still deeper, because, being uncultivated, he is less removed from nature. In Germany, stormbeaten, in wretched boats of hide, amid the hardships and dangers of seafaring life, they were pre-eminently adapted for endurance and enterprise, inured to misfortune, scorners of danger. Pirates at first: of all kinds of hunting the man-hunt is most profitable and most noble; they left the care of the land and flocks to the women and slaves; seafaring, war, and pillage[2] was their whole idea of a freeman's work. They dashed to sea in their two-sailed barks, landed anywhere, killed everything; and having sacrificed in honour of their gods the tithe of their prisoners, and leaving behind them the red light of their burnings, went farther on to begin again. 'Lord,' says a certain litany, 'deliver us from the fury of the Jutes.' 'Of all barbarians[3] these are strongest of body and heart, the most formidable,'—we may add, the most cruelly ferocious. When murder becomes a trade, it becomes a pleasure. About the eighth century, the final decay of the great Roman corpse which Charlemagne had tried to revive, and which was settling down into corruption, called them like vultures to the prey. Those who had remained in Denmark, with their brothers of Norway, fanatical pagans, incensed against the Christians, made a descent on all the surrounding coasts. Their sea-kings,[4] 'who

[1] Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum, passim:* Diem noctemque continuare potando, nulli proborum.—Sera juvenum Venus.—Totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt. Dargaud, *Voyage en Danemark.* 'They take six meals per day, the first at five o'clock in the morning. One should see the faces and meals at Hamburg and at Amsterdam.'

[2] Bede, v. 10. Sidonius, viii. 6. Lingard, *Hist. of England,* 1854, i. chap. 2.

[3] Zozimos, iii. 147. Amm. Marcellinus, xxviii. 526.

[4] Aug. Thierry, *Hist. S. Edmundi,* vi. 441. See Ynglingasaga, and especially the Saga of Egil.

had never slept under the smoky rafters of a roof, who had never drained the ale-horn by an inhabited hearth,' laughed at wind and storms, and sang: 'The blast of the tempest aids our oars; the bellowing of heaven, the howling of the thunder, hurt us not; the hurricane is our servant, and drives us whither we wish to go.' 'We smote with our swords,' says a song attributed to Ragnar Lodbrog; 'to me it was a joy like having my bright bride by me on the couch. . . . He who has never been wounded lives a weary life.' One of them, at the monastery of Peterborough, kills with his own hand all the monks, to the number of eighty-four; others, having taken King Ælla, divided his ribs from the spine, and drew his lungs through the opening, so as to represent an eagle. Harold Harefoot, having seized his rival Alfred, with six hundred men, had them maimed, blinded, hamstrung, scalped, or embowelled.[1] Torture and carnage, greed of danger, fury of destruction, obstinate and frenzied bravery of an over-strong temperament, the unchaining of the butcherly instincts,—such traits meet us at every step in the old Sagas. The daughter of the Danish Jarl, seeing Egil taking his seat near her, repels him with scorn, reproaching him with 'seldom having provided the wolves with hot meat, with never having seen for the whole autumn a raven croaking over the carnage.' But Egil seized her and pacified her by singing: 'I have marched with my bloody sword, and the raven has followed me. Furiously we fought, the fire passed over the dwellings of men; we slept in the blood of those who kept the gates.' From such table-talk, and such maid's fancies, one may judge of the rest.[2]

Behold them now in England, more settled and wealthier: do you look to find them much changed? Changed it may be, but for the worse, like the Franks, like all barbarians who pass from action to enjoyment. They are more gluttonous, carving their hogs, filling themselves with flesh, swallowing down deep draughts of mead, ale, spiced wines, all the strong, coarse drinks which they can procure, and so they are cheered and stimulated. Add to this the pleasure of the fight. Not easily with such instincts can they attain to culture; to find a natural and ready culture, we must look amongst the sober and sprightly populations of the south. Here the sluggish and heavy[3] temperament remains long buried in a brutal life; people of the Latin race, never

[1] Lingard, *Hist. of England*, i. 164, says, however, 'Every tenth man out of the six hundred received his liberty, and of the rest a few were selected for slavery.'—Tr.

[2] Franks, Frisians, Saxons, Danes, Norwegians, Icelanders, are one and the same people. Their language, laws, religion, poetry, differ but little: The more northern continue longest in their primitive manners. Germany in the fourth and fifth centuries, Denmark and Norway in the seventh and eighth, Iceland in the tenth and eleventh centuries, present the same condition, and the documents of each country will fill up the gaps that exist in the history of the others.

[3] Tacitus, *De mor. Germ.* xxii.: Gens nec astuta nec callida.

at a first glance see in them aught but large gross beasts, clumsy and ridiculous when not dangerous and enraged. Up to the sixteenth century, says an old historian, the great body of the nation were little else than herdsmen, keepers of beasts for flesh and fleece; up to the end of the eighteenth drunkenness was the recreation of the higher ranks; it is still that of the lower; and all the refinement and softening influence of civilisation have not abolished amongst them the use of the rod and the fist. If the carnivorous, warlike, drinking savage, proof against the climate, still shows beneath the conventions of our modern society and the softness of our modern polish, imagine what he must have been when, landing with his band upon a wasted or desert country, and becoming for the first time a settler, he saw on the horizon the common pastures of the border country, and the great primitive forests which furnished stags for the chase and acorns for his pigs. The ancient histories tell us that they had a great and a coarse appetite.[1] Even at the time of the Conquest the custom of drinking to excess was a common vice with men of the highest rank, and they passed in this way whole days and nights without intermission. Henry of Huntingdon, in the twelfth century, lamenting the ancient hospitality, says that the Norman kings provided their courtiers with only one meal a day, while the Saxon kings used to provide four. One day, when Athelstan went with his nobles to visit his relative Ethelfleda, the provision of mead was exhausted at the first salutation, owing to the copiousness of the draughts; but Saint Dunstan, forecasting the extent of the royal appetite, had furnished the house, so that though the cup-bearers, as is the custom at royal feasts, were able the whole day to serve it out in horns and other vessels, the liquor was not found to be deficient. When the guests were satisfied, the harp passed from hand to hand, and the rude harmony of their deep voices swelled under the vaulted roof. The monasteries themselves in Edgard's time kept up games, songs, and dances till midnight. To shout, to drink, to caper about, to feel their veins heated and swollen with wine, to hear and see around them the riot of the orgy, this was the first need of the Barbarians.[2] The heavy human brute gluts himself with sensations and with noise.

For this appetite there was a stronger grazing-ground,—I mean, blows and battle. In vain they attached themselves to the soil, became cultivators, in distinct communities and distinct regions, shut up[3] in their march with their kindred and comrades, bound together, sepa-

[1] Craik and MacFarlane, *Pictorial History of England*, 1837, i. 337. W. of Malmesbury. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 365.

[2] Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum*, xxii., xxiii.

[3] Kemble, *Saxons in England*, 1849, i. 70, ii. 184. 'The Acts of an Anglo-Saxon parliament are a series of treaties of peace between all the associations which make up the state; a continual revision and renewal of the alliances offensive and defensive of all the free men. They are universally mutual contracts for the maintenance of the frid or peace.'

rated from the mass, marked round by sacred landmarks, by primeval oaks on which they cut the figures of birds and beasts, by poles set up in the midst of the marsh, which whosoever removed was punished with merciless tortures. In vain these Marches and Ga's[1] were grouped into states, and finally formed a half-regulated society, with assemblies and laws, under the lead of a single king; its very structure indicates the necessities to supply which it was created. They united in order to maintain peace; treaties of peace occupy their Parliaments; provisions for peace are the matter of their laws. War was waged daily and everywhere; the aim of life was, not to be slain, ransomed, mutilated, pillaged, hung and of course, if it was a woman, violated.[2] Every man was obliged to appear armed, and to be ready, with his burgh or his township, to repel marauders, who went about in bands; one such consisted of thirty-five and more. The animal was yet too powerful, too impetuous, too untamed. Anger and covetousness in the first place brought him upon his prey. Their history, such as that of the Heptarchy, is like a history of 'kites and crows.'[3] They slew the Britons or reduced them to slavery, fought the remnant of the Welsh, Irish, and Picts, massacred one another, were hewn down and cut to pieces by the Danes. In a hundred years, out of fourteen kings of Northumbria, seven were slain and six deposed. Penda of Mercia killed five kings, and in order to win the town of Bamborough, demolished all the neighbouring villages, heaped their ruins into an immense pile, sufficient to burn all the inhabitants, undertook to exterminate the Northumbrians, and perished himself by the sword at the age of eighty. Many amongst them were put to death by the thanes; one thane was burned alive; brothers slew one another treacherously. With us civilisation has interposed, between the desire and its fulfilment, the counteracting and softening preventive of reflection and calculation; here, the impulse is sudden, and murder and every kind of excess spring from it instantaneously. King Edwy[4] having married Elgiva, his relation within the prohibited degrees, quitted the hall where he was drinking on the very day of his coronation, to be with her. The nobles thought themselves insulted, and immediately Abbot Dunstan went himself to seek the young man. 'He found the adulteress,' says the monk Osbern, 'her mother, and the king together on the bed of debauch. He dragged the king thence violently, and setting the crown upon his head, brought

[1] A large district; the word is still existing in German, as Rheingau, Breisgau. —Tr.

[2] Turner, *Hist. of the Anglo-Sax.* ii. 440, Laws of Ina.

[3] Milton's expression. Lingard's *History*, i. chap. 3. This history bears much resemblance to that of the Franks in Gaul. See Gregory of Tours. The Saxons, like the Franks, were somewhat softened, but above all depraved, and were pillaged and massacred by those of their northern brothers who had remained in a savage state.

[4] Vita S. Dunstani, *Anglia Sacra*, ii.

him back to the nobles.' Afterwards Elgiva sent men to deprive Dunstan of his eyes, and then, in a revolt, saved herself and the king by hiding in the country; but the men of the North having seized her, 'hamstrung her, and then subjected her to the death which she deserved.'[1] Barbarity follows barbarity. At Bristol, at the time of the Conquest, as we are told by an historian of the time,[2] it was the custom to buy men and women in all parts of England, and to carry them to Ireland for sale. The buyers usually made the women pregnant, and took them to market in that condition, in order to ensure a better price. 'You might have seen with sorrow long files of young people of both sexes and of the greatest beauty, bound with ropes, and daily exposed for sale. . . . They sold in this manner as slaves their nearest relatives, and even their own children.' And the chronicler adds that, having abandoned this practice, they 'thus set an example to all the rest of England.' Would you know the manners of the highest ranks, in the family of the last king?[3] At a feast in the king's hall, Harold was serving Edward the Confessor with wine, when Tostig, his brother, stimulated by envy at his favour, seized him by the hair. They were separated. Tostig went to Hereford, where Harold had ordered a great royal banquet to be prepared. There he seized his brother's attendants, and cutting off their heads and limbs, he placed them in the vessels of wine, ale, mead, and cider, and sent a message to the king: 'If you go to your farm, you will find there plenty of salt meat, but you will do well to carry some more with you.' Harold's other brother, Sweyn, had violated the abbess Elgiva, assassinated Beorn the thane, and being banished from the country, had turned pirate. When we regard their deeds of violence, their ferocity, their cannibal jests, we see that they were not far removed from the sea-kings, or from the followers of Odin, who ate raw flesh, hung men as victims on the sacred trees of Upsal, and killed one another to make sure of dying as they had lived, in blood. A score of times the old ferocious instinct reappears beneath the thin crust of Christianity. In the eleventh century, Sigeward,[4] the great Duke of Northumberland, was afflicted with a dysentery; and feeling his death near, exclaimed, 'What a shame for me not to have been permitted to die in so many battles, and to end thus by a cow's death! At least put on my breastplate, gird on my sword, set my helmet on my head, my shield in my left hand, my golden battle-axe in my right,

[1] It is amusing to compare the story of Edwy and Elgiva in Turner, ii. 216, etc., and then in Lingard, i. 132, etc. The first accuses Dunstan, the other defends him.—TR.

[2] *Life of Bishop Wolstan.*

[3] Tantæ sævitiæ erant fratres illi quod, cum alicujus nitidam villam conspicerent, dominatorem de nocte interfici juberent, totamque progeniem illius possessionemque defuncti obtinerent. Turner, iii. 27. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 367.

[4] 'Penè gigas statura,' says the chronicler. H. of Huntingdon, vi. 367. Kemble, i. 393. Turner, ii. 318.

so that a great warrior, like myself, may die as a warrior.' They did as he bade, and thus died he honourably with his arms. They had made one step, and only one, from barbarism.

III.

Under this native barbarism there were noble dispositions, unknown to the Roman world, which were destined to produce a better people out of the ruins of these. In the first place, 'a certain earnestness, which leads them out of idle sentiments to noble ones.'[1] From their origin in Germany this is what we find them, severe in manner, with grave inclinations and a manly dignity. They live solitary, each one near the spring or the wood which has taken his fancy.[2] Even in villages the cottages were detached; they must have independence and free air. They had no taste for voluptuousness; love was tardy, education severe, their food simple; all the recreation they indulged in was the hunting of the aurochs, and a dance amongst naked swords. Violent intoxication and perilous wagers were their weakest points; they sought in preference not mild pleasures, but strong excitement. In everything, in rude and masculine instincts, they were men. Each in his own home, on his own land, and in his own hut, was master of himself, firm and self-contained, in no wise restrained or shackled. If the commonweal received anything from him, it was because he gave it. In all great conferences he gave his vote in arms, passed judgment in the assembly, made alliances and wars on his own account, moved from place to place, showed activity and daring.[3] The modern Englishman existed entire in this Saxon. If he bends, it is because he is quite willing to bend; he is no less capable of self-denial than of independence; sacrifice is not uncommon, a man cares not for his life and his blood. In Homer the warrior often gives way, and is not blamed if he flees. In the Sagas, in the Edda, he must be over-brave; in Germany the coward is drowned in the mud, under a hurdle. Through all outbreaks of primitive brutality gleams obscurely the grand idea of duty, which is, the self-constraint exercised in view of some noble end. Marriage was pure amongst them, chastity instinctive. Amongst the Saxons the adulterer was punished by death; the adulteress was obliged to hang herself, or was stabbed by the knives of her companions. The wives of the Cimbrians, when they could not obtain from Marius assurance of their chastity, slew themselves with their own hands. They thought there was something sacred in a woman; they married but one, and kept faith with her. In fifteen centuries the idea of marriage is unchanged amongst them. The wife, on entering her husband's home,

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1 Grimm, *Mythology*, 53, Preface.

2 Tacitus, xx., xxiii., xi., xii., xiii., et passim. We may still see the traces of this taste in English dwellings.

3 Tacitus, xiii.

is aware that she gives herself altogether,[1] 'that she will have but one body, one life with him; that she will have no thought, no desire beyond; that she will be the companion of his perils and labours; that she will suffer and dare as much as he, both in peace and war.' And he, like her, knows that he gives himself. Having chosen his chief, he forgets himself in him, assigns to him his own glory, serves him to the death. 'He is infamous as long as he lives, who returns from the field of battle without his chief.'[2] It was on this voluntary subordination that feudal society was based. Man, in this race, can accept a superior, can be capable of devotion and respect. Thrown back upon himself by the gloom and severity of his climate, he has discovered moral beauty, while others discover sensuous beauty. This kind of naked brute, who lies all day by his fireside, sluggish and dirty, always eating and drinking,[3] whose rusty faculties cannot follow the clear and fine outlines of poetic forms, catches a glimpse of the sublime in his troubled dreams. He does not see it, but simply feels it; his religion is already within, as it will be in the sixteenth century, when he will cast off the sensuous worship of Rome, and confirm the faith of the heart.[4] His gods are not enclosed in walls; he has no idols. What he designates by divine names, is something invisible and grand, which floats through nature, and is conceived beyond nature,[5] a mysterious infinity which the sense cannot touch, but which 'reverence alone can appreciate;' and when, later on, the legends define and alter this vague divination of natural powers, an idea remains at the bottom of this chaos of giant-dreams; that the world is a warfare, and heroism the greatest excellence.

In the beginning, say the old Icelandic legends,[6] there were two worlds, Niflheim the frozen, and Muspell the burning. From the falling snow-flakes was born the giant Ymir. 'There was in times of old, where Ymir dwelt, nor sand nor sea, nor gelid waves; earth existed not, nor heaven above; 'twas a chaotic chasm, and grass nowhere.' There was but Ymir, the horrible frozen Ocean, with his children, sprung from his feet and his armpits; then their shapeless progeny, Terrors of the abyss, barren Mountains, Whirlwinds of the North, and

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[1] Tacitus, xix., viii., xvi. Kemble, i. 232. [2] Tacitus, xiv.

[3] 'In omni domo, nudi et sordidi. . . . Plus per otium transigunt, dediti somno, ciboque; totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt.'

[4] Grimm, 53, Preface. Tacitus, x.

[5] 'Deorum nominibus appellant secretum illud, quod sola reverentia vident.' Later on, at Upsal for instance, they had images (Adam of Bremen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*). Wuotan (Odin) signifies etymologically the All-Powerful, him who penetrates and circulates through everything (Grimm, *Mythol.*).

[6] *Edda Sæmundi, Edda Snorri*, ed. Copenhagen, three vols. *passim*. Mr. Bergmann has translated several of these poems into French, which Mr. Taine quotes. The translator has generally made use of the edition of Mr. Thorpe, London, Trübner, 1866.

other malevolent beings, enemies of the sun and of life; then the cow Andhumbla, born also of melting snow, brings to light, whilst licking the hoar-frost from the rocks, a man Bur, whose grandsons kill the giant Ymir. 'From his flesh the earth was formed, and from his bones the hills, the heaven from the skull of that ice-cold giant, and from his blood the sea; but of his brains the heavy clouds are all created.' Then arose war between the monsters of winter and the luminous fertile gods, Odin the founder, Baldur the mild and benevolent, Thor the summer-thunder, who purifies the air and nourishes the earth with showers. Long fought the gods against the frozen Jötuns, against the dark bestial powers, the wolf Fenrir, the great Serpent, whom they drown in the sea, the treacherous Loki, whom they bind to the rocks, beneath a viper whose venom drops continually on his face. Long will the heroes, who by a bloody death deserve to be placed 'in the halls of Odin, and there wage a combat every day,' assist the gods in their mighty war. A day will, however, arrive when gods and men will be conquered. Then

'trembles Yggdrasil's ash yet standing; groans that ancient tree, and the Jötun Loki is loosed. The shadows groan on the ways of Hel,[1] until the fire of Surt has consumed the tree. Hrym steers from the east, the waters rise, the mundane snake is coiled in jötun-rage. The worm beats the water, and the eagle screams; the pale of beak tears carcases; (the ship) Naglfar is loosed. Surt from the South comes with flickering flame; shines from his sword the Val-god's sun. The stony hills are dashed together, the giantesses totter; men tread the path of Hel, and heaven is cloven. The sun darkens, earth in ocean sinks, fall from heaven the bright stars, fire's breath assails the all-nourishing tree, towering fire plays against heaven itself.'[2]

The gods perish, devoured one by one by the monsters; and the celestial legend, sad and grand now like the life of man, bears witness to the hearts of warriors and heroes.

There is no fear of grief, no care for life; they count it as dross when the idea has seized upon them. The trembling of the nerves, the repugnance of animal instinct which starts back before wounds and death, are all lost in an irresistible determination. See how in their epic[3] the sublime springs up amid the horrible, like a bright purple flower amid a pool of blood. Sigurd has plunged his sword into the dragon Fafnir, and at that very moment they looked on one another; and Fafnir asks, as he dies, 'Who art thou? and who is thy father? and what thy kin, that thou wert so hardy as to bear weapons against

[1] Hel, the goddess of death, born of Loki and Angrboda.—Tr.

[2] Thorpe, *The Edda of Sæmund, The Vala's Prophecy*, str. 48–56, p. 9 *et passim*.

[3] *Fafnismâl Edda*. This epic is common to the Northern races, as is the *Iliad* to the Greek populations, and is found almost entire in Germany in the *Nibelungen Lied*. The translator has also used Magnusson and Morris' poetical version of the *Völsunga Saga*, and certain songs of the *Elder Edda*, London, Ellis, 1870.

me?' 'A hardy heart urged me on thereto, and a strong hand and this sharp sword. . . . Seldom hath hardy eld a faint-heart youth.' After this triumphant eagle's cry Sigurd cuts out the worm's heart; but Regin, brother of Fafnir, drinks blood from the wound, and falls asleep. Sigurd, who was roasting the heart, raises his finger thoughtlessly to his lips. Forthwith he understands the language of the birds. The eagles scream above him in the branches. They warn him to mistrust Regin. Sigurd cuts off the latter's head, eats of Fafnir's heart, drinks his blood and his brother's. Amongst all these murders their courage and poetry grow. Sigurd has subdued Brynhild, the untamed maiden, by passing through the flaming fire; they share one couch for three nights, his naked sword betwixt them. 'Nor the damsel did he kiss, nor did the Hunnish king to his arm lift her. He the blooming maid to Giuki's son delivered,' because, according to his oath, he must send her to her betrothed Gunnar. She, setting her love upon him, 'Alone she sat without, at eve of day, began aloud with herself to speak: "Sigurd must be mine; I must die, or that blooming youth clasp in my arms."' But seeing him married, she brings about his death. 'Laughed then Brynhild, Budli's daughter, once only, from her whole soul, when in her bed she listened to the loud lament of Giuki's daughter.' She put on her golden corslet, pierced herself with the sword's point, and as a last request said:

'Let in the plain be raised a pile so spacious, that for us all like room may be; let them burn the Hun (Sigurd) on the one side of me, on the other side my household slaves, with collars splendid, two at our heads, and two hawks; let also lie between us both the keen-edged sword, as when we both one couch ascended; also five female thralls, eight male slaves of gentle birth fostered with me.'[1]

All were burnt together; yet Gudrun the widow continued motionless by the corpse, and could not weep. The wives of the jarls came to console her, and each of them told her own sorrows, all the calamities of great devastations and the old life of barbarism.

'Then spoke Giaflang, Giuki's sister: "Lo, up on earth I live most loveless, who of five mates must see the ending, of daughters twain and three sisters, of brethren eight, and abide behind lonely." Then spake Herborg, Queen of Hunland: "Crueller tale have I to tell of my seven sons, down in the Southlands, and the eight man, my mate, felled in the death-mead. Father and mother, and four brothers on the wide sea the winds and death played with; the billows beat on the bulwark boards. Alone must I sing o'er them, alone must I array them, alone must my hands deal with their departing; and all this was in one season's wearing, and none was left for love or solace. Then was I bound a prey of the battle when that same season wore to its ending; as a tiring may must I bind the shoon of the duke's high dame, every day at dawning. From her jealous hate gat I heavy mocking, cruel lashes she laid upon me."'[2]

[1] Thorpe, *The Edda of Sæmund, Third lay of Sigurd Fafnicide*, str. 62–64, p. 83.

[2] Magnusson and Morris, *Story of the Volsungs and Nibelungs, Lamentation of Gudrun*, p. 118 *et passim*.

All was in vain; no word could draw tears from those dry eyes. They were obliged to lay the bloody corpse before her, ere her tears would come. Then a flood of tears ran down over her knees, and 'the geese withal that were in the home-field, the fair fowls the may owned, fell a-screaming.' She wishes to die, like Sigurd, on the corpse of him whom alone she had loved, if they had not deprived her of memory by a magic potion. Thus affected, she departs in order to marry Atli, king of the Huns; and yet she goes against her will, with gloomy forebodings: for murder begets murder; and her brothers, the murderers of Sigurd, having been drawn to Atli's court, fall in their turn into a snare like that which they had themselves laid. Then Gunnar was bound, and they tried to make him deliver up the treasure. He answers with a barbarian's laugh:

'"Högni's heart in my hand shall lie, cut bloody from the breast of the valiant chief, the king's son, with a dull-edged knife." They the heart cut out from Hialli's breast; on a dish, bleeding, laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Then said Gunnar, lord of men: "Here have I the heart of the timid Hialli, unlike the heart of the bold Högni; for much it trembles as in the dish it lies; it trembled more by half while in his breast it lay." Högni laughed when to his heart they cut the living crest-crasher; no lament uttered he. All bleeding on a dish they laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Calmly said Gunnar, the warrior Niflung: "Here have I the heart of the bold Högni, unlike the heart of the timid Hialli; for it little trembles as in the dish it lies: it trembled less while in his breast it lay. So far shalt thou, Atli! be from the eyes of men as thou wilt from the treasures be. In my power alone is all the hidden Niflung's gold, now that Högni lives not. Ever was I wavering while we both lived; now am I so no longer, as I alone survive."'[1]

It was the last insult of the self-confident man, who values neither his own life nor that of another, so that he can satiate his vengeance. They cast him into the serpent's den, and there he died, striking his harp with his foot. But the inextinguishable flame of vengeance passed from his heart to that of his sister. Corpse after corpse fell on each other; a mighty fury hurls them open-eyed to death. She killed the children she had by Atli, gave him their hearts to eat, served in honey, one day on his return from the carnage, and laughed coldly as she told him on what he had fed. 'Uproar was on the benches, portentous the cry of men, noise beneath the costly hangings. The children of the Huns wept; all wept save Gudrun, who never wept, or for her bear-fierce brothers, or for her dear sons, young, simple.'[2] Judge from this heap of ruin and carnage to what excess the mind could attain. There were men amongst them, Berserkirs,[3] who in battle, seized with a sort of madness, showed a sudden and super-

[1] Thorpe, *The Edda of Sœmund, Lay of Atli*, str. 21-27, p. 117.

[2] *Ibid.* str. 38, p. 119.

[3] This word signifies men who fought without a breastplate, perhaps in shirts only; *Scottice*, 'Baresarks.'—TR.

human strength, and ceased to feel their wounds. This is the conception of a hero as engendered by this race in its infancy. Is it not strange to see them place their happiness in battle, their beauty in death? Is there any people, Hindoo, Persian, Greek, or Gallic, which has formed so tragic a conception of life? Is there any which has peopled its infantine mind with such gloomy dreams? Is there any which has so entirely banished the sweetness from enjoyment, and the softness from pleasure? Energy, tenacious and mournful energy, an ecstasy of energy—such was their chosen condition. Carlyle said well, that in the sombre obstinacy of an English labourer still survives the tacit rage of the Scandinavian warrior. Strife for strife's sake—such is their pleasure. With what sadness, madness, waste, such a disposition breaks its bonds, we shall see in Shakspeare and Byron; with what completeness, in what duties it can entrench and employ itself under moral ideas, we shall see in the case of the Puritans.

IV.

They have established themselves in England; and however disordered the society which binds them together, it is founded, as in Germany, on generous sentiment. War is at every door, I am aware, but warlike virtues are behind every door; courage chiefly, then fidelity. Under the brute there is a free man, and a man with a heart. There is no man amongst them who, at his own risk,[1] will not make alliance, go forth to fight, undertake adventures. There is no group of men amongst them, who, in their Witenagemote, is not for ever concluding alliances one with another. Every clan, in its own district, forms a league of which all the members, 'brothers of the sword,' defend each other, and demand each other's blood at the price of their own. Every chief in his hall reckons that he has friends, not mercenaries, in the faithful ones who drink his beer, and who, having received as marks of his confidence, bracelets, swords, and suits of armour, will cast themselves between him and danger on the day of battle.[2] Independence and bravery smoulder amongst this young nation with violence and excess; but these are of themselves noble things; and no less noble are the sentiments which serve them for discipline,—to wit, an affectionate devotion, and respect for plighted faith. These appear in their laws, and break forth in their poetry. Amongst them greatness of heart gives matter for imagination. Their characters are not selfish and shifty, like those of Homer. They are brave hearts, simple[3] and strong, faithful to their relatives, to their master in arms, firm and stedfast to enemies and friends, abounding in courage, and ready for sacrifice. 'Old as I am,' says one, 'I will not budge hence. I mean

[1] See the Life of Sweyn, of Hereward, etc., even up to the time of the Conquest.

[2] Beowulf, *passim*, Death of Byrhtnoth.

[3] Tacitus, 'Gens nec callida, nec astuta.'

to die by my lord's side, near this man I have loved so much. He kept his word, the word he had given to his chief, to the distributor of gifts, promising him that they should return to the town, safe and sound to their homes, or that they would fall both together, in the thick of the carnage, covered with wounds. He lay by his master's side, like a faithful servant.' Though awkward in speech, their old poets find touching words when they have to paint these manly friendships. We cannot without emotion hear them relate how the old 'king embraced the best of his thanes, and put his arms about his neck, how the tears flowed down the cheeks of the greyhaired chief. . . . The valiant man was so dear to him. He could not stop the flood which mounted from his breast. In his heart, deep in the cords of his soul, he sighed in secret after the beloved man.' Few as are the songs which remain to us, they return to this subject again and again. The wanderer in a reverie dreams about his lord:[1] It seems to him in his spirit as if he kisses and embraces him, and lays head and hands upon his knees, as oft before in the olden time, when he rejoiced in his gifts. Then he wakes—a man without friends. He sees before him the desert tracks, the seabirds dipping in the sea, stretching wide their wings, the frost and the snow, mingled with falling hail. Then his heart's wounds press more heavily. The exile says:

''Often and often we two were agreed, that nought should divide us save Death himself! Now all is changed, and our friendship is as though it had never been. I must dwell here, far from my well-beloved friend, in the midst of enmities. I am forced to live under the forest leaves, under an oak, in this cavern under ground. Cold is this earth-dwelling; I am weary of it. Dark are the valleys, high the mountains, a sad wall of boughs, covered with brambles, a joyless abode. . . . My friends are in the earth; they whom I loved in life, the tomb holds them. And I am here before the dawn; I walk alone under the oak, amongst the earth-caverns. . . . Here often and often the loss of my lord has oppressed me with heavy grief.'

Amid their perilous mode of life, and the perpetual appeal to arms, there exists no sentiment more warm than friendship, nor any virtue stronger than loyalty.

Thus supported by powerful affection and firm fidelity, society is kept wholesome. Marriage is like the state. We find women associating with the men, at their feasts, sober and respected.[2] She speaks, and they listen to her; no need for concealing or enslaving her, in order to restrain or retain her. She is a person, and not a thing. The law demands her consent to marriage, surrounds her with guarantees, accords her protection. She can inherit, possess, bequeath, appear in courts of justice, in county assemblies, in the great congress of the elders. Frequently the name of the queen and of several other ladies is inscribed

1 *The Wanderer, the Exile's Song, Codex Exoniensis*, published by Thorpe.

2 Turner, *Hist. Angl. Sax.* iii. 63; *Pictorial History*, i. 340.

in the proceedings of the Witenagemote. Law and tradition maintain her integrity, as if she were a man, and side by side with the man. In Alfred[1] there is a portrait of the wife, which for purity and elevation equals all that we can devise with our modern refinement.

'Thy wife now lives for thee—for thee alone. She has enough of all kind of wealth for this present life, but she scorns them all for thy sake alone. She has forsaken them all, because she had not thee with them. Thy absence makes her think that all she possesses is nought. Thus, for love of thee, she is wasted away, and lies near death for tears and grief.'

Already, in the legends of the *Edda*, we have seen the maiden Sigrun at the tomb of Helgi, 'as glad as the voracious hawks of Odin, when they of slaughter know, of warm prey,' desiring to sleep still in the arms of death, and die at last on his grave. Nothing here like the love we find in the primitive poetry of France, Provence, Spain, and Greece. There is an absence of gaiety, of delight; beyond marriage it is only a ferocious appetite, an outbreak of the instinct of the beast. It appears nowhere with its charm and its smile; there is no love song in this ancient poetry. The reason is, that with them love is not an amusement and a pleasure, but a promise and a devotion. All is grave, even sombre, in civil relations as in conjugal society. As in Germany, amid the sadness of a melancholic temperament and the savagery of a barbarous life, the most tragic human faculties, the deep power of love and the grand power of will, are the only ones that sway and act.

This is why the hero, as in Germany, is truly heroic. Let us speak of him at length; we retain one of their poems, that of Beowulf, almost entire. Here are the stories, which the thanes, seated on their stools, by the light of their torches, listened to as they drank the ale of their king: we can glean thence their manners and sentiments, as in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* those of the Greeks. Beowulf is a hero, a knight-errant before the days of chivalry, as the leaders of the German bands were feudal chiefs before the institution of feudalism.[2] He has 'rowed upon the sea, his naked sword hard in his hand, amidst the fierce waves and coldest of storms, and the rage of winter hurtled over the waves of the deep.' The sea-monsters, 'the many-coloured foes, drew him to the bottom of the sea, and held him fast in their gripe.' But he reached 'the wretches with his point and with his war-bill.' 'The mighty sea-beast received the war-rush through his hands,' and he slew nine nickors (sea-monsters). And now behold him, as he comes across the waves to succour the old King Hrothgar, who with his vassals sits afflicted in his great mead-hall, high and curved with pin-

[1] Alfred borrows his portrait from Boethius, but almost entirely re-writes it.

[2] Kemble thinks that the origin of this poem is very ancient, perhaps contemporary with the invasion of the Angles and Saxons, but that the version we possess is later than the seventh century.—Kemble's *Beowulf*, text and translation, 1833. The characters are Danish.

nacles. For 'a grim stranger, Grendel, a mighty haunter of the marshes,' had entered his hall during the night, seized thirty of the thanes who were asleep, and returned in his war-craft with their carcasses; for twelve years the dreadful ogre, the beastly and greedy creature, father of Orks and Jötuns, devoured men and emptied the best of houses. Beowulf, the great warrior, offers to grapple with the fiend, and foe to foe contend for life, without the bearing of either sword or ample shield, for he has 'learned also that the wretch for his cursed hide recketh not of weapons,' asking only that if death takes him, they will bear forth his bloody corpse and bury it; mark his fen-dwelling; send to Hygelác, his chief, the best of war-shrouds that guards his breast.

He is lying in the hall, 'trusting in his proud strength; and when the mists of night arose, lo, Grendel comes, tears open the door,' seized a sleeping warrior: 'he tore him unawares, he bit his body, he drank the blood from the veins, he swallowed him with continual tearings.' But Beowulf seized him in turn, and 'raised himself upon his elbow.'

'The lordly hall thundered, the ale was spilled . . . both were enraged; savage and strong warders; the house resounded; then was it a great wonder that the wine-hall withstood the beasts of war, that it fell not upon the earth, the fair palace; but it was thus fast. . . . The noise arose, new enough; a fearful terror fell on the North Danes, on each of those who from the wall heard the outcry, God's denier sing his dreadful lay, his song of defeat, lament his wound.[1] . . . The foul wretch awaited the mortal wound; a mighty gash was evident upon his shoulder; the sinews sprung asunder, the junctures of the bones burst; success in war was given to Beowulf. Thence must Grendel fly sick unto death, among the refuges of the fens, to seek his joyless dwelling. He all the better knew that the end of his life, the number of his days was gone by.'[2]

For he had left on the land, 'hand, arm, and shoulder;' and 'in the lake of Nicors, where he was driven, the rough wave was boiling with blood, the foul spring of waves all mingled, hot with poison; the dye, discoloured with death, bubbled with warlike gore.' There remained a female monster, his mother, who like him 'was doomed to inhabit the terror of waters, the cold streams,' who came by night, and amidst drawn swords tore and devoured another man, Æschere, the king's best friend. A lamentation arose in the palace, and Beowulf offered himself again. They went to the den, a hidden land, the refuge of the wolf, near the windy promontories, where a mountain stream rusheth downwards under the darkness of the hills, a flood beneath the earth; the wood fast by its roots overshadoweth the water; there may one by night behold a marvel, fire upon the flood: the stepper over the heath, when wearied out by the hounds, sooner will give up his soul, his life upon the brink, than plunge therein to hide his head. Strange dragons and serpents swam there; 'from time to time the horn sang a dirge, a

[1] Kemble's *Beowulf*, xi. p. 32.

[2] *Ibid.* xii. p. 34.

terrible song.' Beowulf plunged into the wave, descended, passed monsters who tore his coat of mail, to the ogress, the hateful manslayer, who, seizing him in her grasp, bore him off to her dwelling. A pale gleam shone brightly, and there, face to face, the good champion perceived

'the she-wolf of the abyss, the mighty sea-woman; he gave the war-onset with his battle-bill; he held not back the swing of the sword, so that on her head the ring-mail sang aloud a greedy war-song. . . . The beam of war would not bite. Then he caught the Grendel's mother by the shoulder; twisted the homicide, that she bent upon the floor. . . . She drew her knife broad, brown-edged, (and tried to pierce) the twisted breast-net which protected his life. . . . Then saw he among the weapons a bill fortunate with victory, an old gigantic sword, doughty of edge, ready for use, a work of giants. He seized the belted hilt; the warrior of the Scyldings, fierce and savage whirled the ring-mail; despairing of life, he struck furiously, so that it grappled hard with her about her neck; it broke the bone-rings, the bill passed through all the doomed body; she sank upon the floor; the sword was bloody, the man rejoiced in his deed; the beam shone, light stood within, even as from heaven mildly shines the lamp of the firmament.'[1]

Then he saw Grendel dead in a corner of the hall; and four of his companions, having with difficulty raised the monstrous head, bore it by the hair to the palace of the king.

That was his first labour; and the rest of his life was similar. When he had reigned fifty years on earth, a dragon, who had been robbed of his treasure, came from the hill and burned men and houses 'with waves of fire.'

'Then did the refuge of earls command to make for him a variegated shield, all of iron; he knew that a shield of wood could not help him, lindenwood opposed to fire. . . . The prince of rings was then too proud to seek the wide flier with a troop, with a large company; he feared not for himself that battle, nor did he make any account of the dragon's war, his laboriousness and valour.'

And yet he was sad, and went unwillingly, for he was 'fated to abide the end.' Then

'he was ware of a cavern, a mound under the earth, nigh to the sea-wave, the dashing of waters, which was full within of embossed ornaments and wires. . . . Then the king, hard in war, sat upon the promontory, and bade farewell to his household comrades. . . . I, the old guardian of my people, seek a feud.'

He let words proceed from his heart, the dragon came, vomiting fire; the blade bit not his body, and the king suffered painfully, involved in fire. His comrades had turned into the woods, all save Wiglaf, who went through the fatal smoke, knowing well 'that it was not the old custom' to abandon relation and prince, 'that he alone shall suffer distress, shall sink in battle.'

'The worm became furious, the foul insidious stranger, variegated with waves of fire, . . . hot and warlike fierce, he clutched the whole neck with bitter banes; he was bloodied with life-gore, the blood boiled in waves.'[2]

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[1] *Beowulf*, xxii., xxiii., p. 62 *et passim.*

[2] *Ibid.* xxxiii.-xxxvi., p. 94 *et passim.*

They, with their swords, carved the worm in the midst. Yet the wound of the king became burning and swelled; he soon discovered that the poison boiled in his breast within, and sat by the wall upon a stone; 'he looked upon the work of giants, how the eternal cavern held within stone arches fast upon pillars.'

Then he said, 'I have held this people fifty years; there was not any king of my neighbours who dared to greet me with warriors, to oppress me with terror. . . . I held mine own well, I sought not treacherous malice, nor swore unjustly many oaths; on account of all this, I, sick with mortal wounds, may have joy. . . . Now do thou go immediately to behold the hoard under the hoary stone, my dear Wiglaf. . . . Now, I have purchased with my death a hoard of treasures; it will be yet of advantage at the need of my people. . . . I give thanks . . . that I might before my dying day obtain such for my people . . . longer may I not here be.'[1]

This is thorough and real generosity, not exaggerated and pretended, as it will be later on in the romantic imaginations of babbling clerics, mere composers of adventure. Fiction as yet is not far removed from fact: the man breathes manifest under the hero. Rude as the poetry is, its hero is grand; he is so, simply by his deeds. Faithful, first to his prince, then to his people, he went alone, in a strange land, to venture himself for the delivery of his fellow-men; he forgets himself in death, while thinking only that it profits others. 'Each one of us,' he says in one place, 'must abide the end of his present life.' Let, therefore, each do justice, if he can, before his death. Compare with him the monsters whom he destroys, the last traditions of the ancient wars against inferior races, and of the primitive religion; think of his life of danger, nights upon the waves, man's efforts against the brute creation, the indomitable breast crushing the breasts of beasts, powerful muscles which, when exerted, tear the flesh of the monsters: you will see through the mist of legends, and under the light of poetry, the valiant men who, amid the furies of war and the raging of their own mood, began to settle a people and to found a state.

V.

One poem nearly whole and two or three fragments are all that remain of this lay-poetry of England. The rest of the pagan current, German and barbarian, was arrested or overwhelmed, first by the influx of the Christian religion, then by the conquest of the Norman-French. But the remnant more than suffices to show the strange and powerful poetic genius of the race, and to exhibit beforehand the flower in the bud.

If there has ever been anywhere a deep and serious poetic sentiment, it is here. They do not speak, they sing, or rather cry out. Each little verse is an acclamation, which breaks forth like a growl; their strong breasts heave with a groan of anger or enthusiasm, and a vehement phrase or indistinct expression rises suddenly, almost in spite

[1] *Beowulf*, xxxvii., xxxviii., p. 110 *et passim*. I have throughout always used the very words of Kemble's translation.—TR.

of them, to their lips. There is no art, no natural talent, for describing singly and in order the different parts of an object or an event. The fifty rays of light which every phenomenon emits in succession to a regular and well-directed intellect, come to them at once in a glowing and confused beam, disabling them by their force and convergence. Listen to their genuine war-chants, unchecked and violent, as became their terrible voices. To this day, at this distance of time, separated as they are by manners, speech, ten centuries, we seem to hear them still:—

'The army goes forth: the birds sing, the cricket chirps, the war-weapons sound, the lance clangs against the shield. Now shineth the moon, wandering under the sky. Now arise deeds of woe, which the enmity of this people prepares to do. . . . Then in the court came the tumult of war-carnage. They seized with their hands the hollow wood of the shield. They smote through the bones of the head. The roofs of the castle resounded, until Garulf fell in battle, the first of earth-dwelling men, son of Guthlaf. Around him lay many brave men dying. The raven whirled about, dark and sombre, like a willow leaf. There was a sparkling of blades, as if all Finsburg were on fire. Never have I heard of a more worthy battle in war.'[1]

This is the song on Athelstan's victory at Brunanburh:

'Here Athelstan king, of earls the lord, the giver of the bracelets of the nobles, and his brother also, Edmund the ætheling, the Elder a lasting glory won by slaughter in battle, with the edges of swords, at Brunan burh. The wall of shields they cleaved, they hewed the noble banners: with the rest of the family, the children of Edward. . . . Pursuing, they destroyed the Scottish people and the ship-fleet. . . . The field was coloured with the warrior's blood! After that the sun on high, . . . the greatest star! glided over the earth, God's candle bright! till the noble creature hastened to her setting. There lay soldiers many with darts struck down, Northern men over their shields shot. So were the Scotch; weary of ruddy battle. . . . The screamers of war they left behind; the raven to enjoy, the dismal kite, and the black raven with horned beak, and the hoarse toad; the eagle, afterwards to feast on the white flesh; the greedy battle-hawk, and the grey beast, the wolf in the wood.'[2]

Here all is image. In their impassioned minds events are not bald, with the dry propriety of an exact description; each fits in with its pomp of sound, shape, colouring; it is almost a vision which is raised, complete, with its accompanying emotions, joy, fury, excitement. In their speech, arrows are 'the serpents of Hel, shot from bows of horn;' ships are 'great sea-steeds,' the sea is 'a chalice of waves,' the helmet is 'the castle of the head:' they need an extraordinary speech to express their vehement sensations, so that after a time, in Iceland, when this kind of poetry is carried on, the earlier inspiration fails, art replaces nature, the Skalds are reduced to a distorted and obscure jargon. But whatever be the imagery, here as in Iceland, though unique, it is

[1] Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 1826, *Battle of Finsborough*, p. 175. The complete collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry has been published by M. Grein.

[2] Turner, *Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons*, iii., book 9, ch. i. p. 245.

too feeble. The poets cannot satisfy the inner emotion by a single word. Time after time they return to and repeat their idea. 'The sun on high, the great star, God's brilliant candle, the noble creature!' Four subsequent times they employ the same thought, and each time under a new aspect. All its different aspects rise simultaneously before the barbarian's eyes, and each word was like a shock of the semi-hallucination which excited him. Verily, in such a condition, the regularity of speech and of ideas is disturbed at every turn. The succession of thought in the visionary is not the same as in a reasoning mind. One colour induces another; from sound he passes to sound; his imagination is like a diorama of unexplained pictures. His phrases recur and change; he emits the word that comes to his lips without hesitation; he leaps over wide intervals from idea to idea. The more his mind is transported, the quicker and wider the intervals traversed. With one spring he visits the poles of his horizon, and touches in one moment objects which seemed to have the world between them. His ideas are entangled; without notice, abruptly, the poet will return to the idea he has quitted, and insert it in the thought to which he is giving expression. It is impossible to translate these incongruous ideas, which quite disconcert our modern style. At times they are unintelligible.[1] Articles, particles, everything capable of illuminating thought, of marking the connection of terms, of producing regularity of ideas, all rational and logical artifices, are neglected.[2] Passion bellows forth like a great shapeless beast; and that is all. It rises and starts in little abrupt lines; it is the acme of barbarism. Homer's happy poetry is copiously developed, in full narrative, with rich and extended imagery. All the details of a complete picture are not too much for him; he loves to look at things, he lingers over them, rejoices in their beauty, dresses them in splendid words; he is like the Greek girls, who thought themselves ugly if they did not bedeck arms and shoulders with all the gold coins from their purse, and all the treasures from their caskets; his long verses flow by with their cadences, and spread out like a purple robe under an Ionian sun. Here the clumsy-fingered poet mingles and clashes his ideas in a bold measure; if measure there be, he barely observes it; all his ornament is three words beginning with one letter. His chief care is to abridge, to imprison thought in a kind of mutilated cry.[3] The force of the internal

[1] The cleverest Anglo-Saxon scholars, Turner, Conybeare, Thorpe, recognise this difficulty.

[2] Turner, iii. 231, *et passim*. The translations in French, however literal, do injustice to the text; that language is too clear, too logical. No Frenchman can understand this extraordinary phase of intellect, except by taking a dictionary, and deciphering some pages of Anglo-Saxon for a fortnight.

[3] Turner remarks that the same idea expressed by King Alfred, in prose and then in verse, takes in the first case seven words, in the second five. *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, iii. 235.

impression, which, not knowing how to unfold itself, becomes condensed by accumulation; the harshness of the expression, which, subservient to the energy and shocks of the inner sentiment, seeks only to exhibit it intact and original, spite of all order and beauty,—such are the characteristics of their poetry, and these will be the characteristics of the poetry which is to follow.

VI.

A race so constituted was predisposed to Christianity, by its gloom, its aversion to sensual and reckless living, its inclination for the serious and sublime. When their sedentary habits had reconciled their souls to a long period of ease, and weakened the fury which fed their sanguinary religion, they readily inclined to a new faith. The vague adoration of the great powers of nature, which eternally fight for mutual destruction, and, when destroyed, rise up again to the combat, had long since disappeared in the far distance. Society, on its formation, introduced the idea of peace and the need for justice, and the war-gods faded from the minds of men, with the passions which had created them. A century and a half after the invasion by the Saxons,[1] Roman missionaries, bearing a silver cross with a picture of Christ, came in procession chanting a litany. Presently the high priest of the Northumbrians declared in presence of the nobles that the old gods were powerless, and confessed that formerly 'he knew nothing of that which he adored;' and he among the first, lance in hand, assisted to demolish their temple. At his side a chief rose in the assembly, and said:

'You remember, it may be, O king, that which sometimes happens in winter when you are seated at table with your earls and thanes. Your fire is lighted, and your hall warmed, and without is rain and snow and storm. Then comes a swallow flying across the hall; he enters by one door, and leaves by another. The brief moment while he is within is pleasant to him; he feels not rain nor cheerless winter weather; but the moment is brief—the bird flies away in the twinkling of an eye, and he passes from winter to winter. Such, methinks, is the life of man on earth, compared with the uncertain time beyond. It appears for a while; but what is the time which comes after—the time which was before? We know not. If, then, this new doctrine may teach us somewhat of greater certainty, it were well that we should regard it.'

This restlessness, this feeling of the infinite and dark beyond, this sober, melancholy eloquence, were the harbingers of spiritual life.[2] We find nothing like it amongst the nations of the south, naturally pagan, and preoccupied with the present life. These utter barbarians embrace Christianity straightway, through sheer force of mood and clime. To no purpose are they brutal, heavy, shackled by infantine superstitions, capable, like King Knut, of buying for a hundred golden talents the arm of Augustine. They possess the idea of God. This

[1] 596–625. Aug. Thierry, i. 81; Bede, xii. 2.

[2] Jouffroy, *Problem of Human Destiny.*

grand God of the Bible, omnipotent and unique, who disappears almost entirely in the middle ages,[1] obscured by His court and His family, endures amongst them in spite of absurd and grotesque legends. They do not blot Him out under pious romances, by the elevation of the saints, or under feminine caresses, to benefit the infant Jesus and the Virgin. Their grandeur and their severity raise them to His high level; they are not tempted, like artistic and talkative nations, to replace religion by a fair and agreeable narrative. More than any race in Europe, they approach, by the simplicity and energy of their conceptions, the old Hebraic spirit. Enthusiasm is their natural condition; and their new Deity fills them with admiration, as their ancient deities inspired them with fury. They have hymns, genuine odes, which are but a concrete of exclamations. They have no development; they are incapable of restraining or explaining their passion; it bursts forth, in raptures, at the vision of the Almighty. The heart alone speaks here—a strong, barbarous heart. Cædmon, says Bede, their old poet,[2] was a more ignorant man than the others, who knew no poetry; so that in the hall, when they handed him the harp, he was obliged to withdraw, being unable to sing like his companions. Once, keeping night-watch over the stable, he fell asleep. A stranger appeared to him, and asked him to sing something, and these words came into his head: 'Now we ought to praise the Lord of heaven, the power of the Creator, and His skill, the deeds of the Father of glory; how He, being eternal God, is the author of all marvels; who, almighty guardian of the human race, created first for the sons of men the heavens as the roof of their dwelling, and then the earth.'[3] Remembering this when he woke, he came to the town, and they brought him before the learned men, before the abbess Hilda, who, when they had heard him, thought that he had received a gift from heaven, and made him a monk in the abbey. There he spent his life listening to portions of Holy Writ, which were explained to him in Saxon, 'ruminating over them like a pure animal, turned them into most sweet verse.' Thus is true poetry born. These men pray with all the emotion of a new soul; they kneel; they adore; the less they know, the more they think. Some one has said that the first and most sincere hymn is this one word O! Theirs were hardly longer; they only repeated time after time some deep passionate word, with monotonous vehemence. 'In heaven art Thou, our aid and succour, resplendent with happiness! All things bow before Thee, before the glory of Thy Spirit. With one voice they call upon Christ; they all cry: Holy, holy art Thou, King of the angels of heaven, our Lord! and Thy judgments are just and great: they reign for ever and in all places, in the multitude of Thy works.' We are reminded of the songs of the servants of Odin, ton-

[1] Michelet, preface to *La Renaissance;* Didron, *Histoire de Dieu.*

[2] About 630. See *Codex Exoniensis*, Thorpe.

[3] Bede, iv. 24.

sured now, and clad in the garments of monks. Their poetry is the same; they think of God, as of Odin, in a string of short, accumulated, passionate images, like a succession of lightning-flashes; the Christian hymns embody the pagan. One of them, Adhelm, stood on a bridge leading to the town where he lived, and repeated warlike and profane odes alternately with religious poetry, in order to attract and instruct the men of his time. He could do it without changing his key. In one of them, a funeral song, Death speaks. It was one of the last Saxon compositions, containing a terrible Christianity, which seems at the same time to have sprung from the blackest depths of the *Edda*. The brief metre sounds abruptly, with measured stroke, like the passing bell. It is as if one could hear the dull resounding responses which roll through the church, while the rain beats on the dim glass, and the broken clouds sail mournfully in the sky; and our eyes, glued to the pale face of a dead man, feel beforehand the horror of the damp grave into which the living are about to cast him.

'For thee was a house built ere thou wert born; for thee was a mould shapen ere thou of thy mother camest. Its height is not determined, nor its depth measured; nor is it closed up (however long it may be) until I thee bring where thou shalt remain; until I shall measure thee and the sod of the earth. Thy house is not highly built; it is unhigh and low. When thou art in it, the heel-ways are low, the side-ways unhigh. The roof is built thy breast full nigh; so thou shalt in earth dwell full cold, dim, and dark. Doorless is that house, and dark it is within. There thou art fast detained, and Death holds the key. Loathly is that earth-house, and grim to dwell in. There thou shalt dwell, and worms shall share thee. Thus thou art laid, and leavest thy friends. Thou hast no friend that will come to thee, who will ever inquire how that house liketh thee, who shall ever open for thee the door, and seek thee, for soon thou becomest loathly and hateful to look upon.'[1]

Has Jeremy Taylor a more gloomy picture? The two religious poetries, Christian and pagan, are so like, that one might make a common catalogue of their incongruities, images, and legends. In Beowulf, altogether pagan, the Deity appears as Odin, more mighty and serene, and differs from the other only as a peaceful Bretwalda[2] differs from an adventurous and heroic bandit-chief. The Scandinavian monsters, Jötuns, enemies of the Æsir,[3] have not vanished; but they descend from Cain, and are the giants drowned by the flood.[4] Their new hell is nearly the ancient Nástrand,[5] 'a dwelling deadly cold, full of bloody

[1] Conybeare's *Illustrations*, p. 271.

[2] Bretwalda was a species of war-king, or temporary and elective chief of all the Saxons.—TR.

[3] The Æsir (sing. As) are the gods of the Scandinavian nations, of whom Odin was the chief.—TR.

[4] Kemble, i. i. xii. In this chapter he has collected many features which show the endurance of the ancient mythology.

[5] Nástrand is the strand or shore of the dead.—TR.

eagles and pale adders;' and the dreadful last day of judgment, when all will crumble into dust, and make way for a purer world, resembles the final destruction of *Edda*, that 'twilight of the gods,' which will end in a victorious regeneration, an everlasting joy 'under a fairer sun.'

By this natural conformity they were able to make their religious poems indeed poems. Power in spiritual productions arises only from the sincerity of personal and original sentiment. If they can describe religious tragedies, it is because their soul was tragic, and in a degree biblical. They introduce their fierce vehemence into their verses, like the old prophets of Israel, their murderous hatreds, their fanaticism, all the shudderings of their flesh and blood. One of them, whose poem is mutilated, has related the history of Judith—with what inspiration we shall see. It needed a barbarian to display in such strong light excesses, tumult, murder, vengeance, and combat.

'Then was Holofernes exhilarated with wine; in the halls of his guests he laughed and shouted, he roared and dinned. Then might the children of men afar off hear how the stern one stormed and clamoured, animated and elated with wine. He admonished amply that they should bear it well to those sitting on the bench. So was the wicked one over all the day, the lord and his men, drunk with wine, the stern dispenser of wealth; till that they swimming lay over drunk, all his nobility, as they were death-slain.'[1]

The night having arrived, he commands them to bring into his tent 'the illustrious virgin;' then, going in to visit her, he falls drunk on his bed. The moment was come for 'the maid of the Creator, the holy woman.'

'She took the heathen man fast by his hair; she drew him by his limbs towards her disgracefully; and the mischief-ful odious man at her pleasure laid; so as the wretch she might the easiest well command. She with the twisted locks struck the hateful enemy, meditating hate, with the red sword, till she had half cut off his neck; so that he lay in a swoon, drunk and mortally wounded. He was not then dead, not entirely lifeless. She struck then earnest, the woman illustrious in strength, another time the heathen hound, till that his head rolled forth upon the floor. The foul one lay without a coffer; backward his spirit turned under the abyss, and there was plunged below, with sulphur fastened; for ever afterwards wounded by worms. Bound in torments, hard imprisoned, in hell he burns. After his course he need not hope, with darkness overwhelmed, that he may escape from that mansion of worms; but there he shall remain, ever and ever, without end, henceforth in that cavern-house, void of the joys of hope.'[2]

Has any one ever heard a sterner accent of satisfied hate? When Clovis had listened to the Passion play, he cried, 'Why was I not there with my Franks!' So here the old warrior instinct swelled into flame over the Hebrew wars. As soon as Judith returned,

'Men under helms (went out) from the holy city at the dawn itself. They

[1] Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 271.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 272.

dinned shields; men roared loudly. At this rejoiced the lank wolf in the wood, and the wan raven, the fowl greedy of slaughter, both from the west, that the sons of men for them should have thought to prepare their fill on corpses. And to them flew in their paths the active devourer, the eagle, hoary in his feathers. The willowed kite, with his horned beak, sang the song of Hilda. The noble warriors proceeded, they in mail, to the battle, furnished with shields, with swelling banners. . . . They then speedily let fly forth showers of arrows, the serpents of Hilda, from their horn bows; the spears on the ground hard stormed. Loud raged the plunderers of battle; they sent their darts into the throng of the chiefs. . . . They that awhile before the reproach of the foreigners, the taunts of the heathen endured.'[1]

Amongst all these unknown poets[2] there is one whose name we know, Cædmon, perhaps the old Cædmon who wrote the first hymn; like him, at all events, who, paraphrasing the Bible with a barbarian's vigour and sublimity, has shown the grandeur and fury of the sentiment with which the men of these times entered into their new religion. He also sings when he speaks; when he mentions the ark, it is with a profusion of poetic names, 'the floating house, the greatest of floating chambers, the wooden fortress, the moving house, the cavern, the great sea-chest,' and many more. Every time he thinks of it, he sees it with his mind, like a quick luminous vision, and each time under a new aspect, now undulating on the muddy waves, between two ridges of foam, now casting over the water its enormous shadow, black and high like a castle, 'now enclosing in its cavernous sides' the endless ferment of the caged beasts. Like the others, he wrestles with God in his heart; triumphs like a warrior in destruction and victory; and in relating the death of Pharaoh, can hardly speak from anger, or see, because the blood mounts to his eyes:

'The folk was affrighted, the flood-dread seized on their sad souls; ocean wailed with death, the mountain heights were with blood besteamed, the sea foamed gore, crying was in the waves, the water full of weapons, a death-mist rose; the Egyptians were turned back; trembling they fled, they felt fear: would that host gladly find their homes; their vaunt grew sadder: against them, as a cloud, rose the fell rolling of the waves; there came not any of that host to home, but from behind inclosed them fate with the wave. Where ways ere lay sea raged. Their might was merged, the streams stood, the storm rose high to heaven; the loudest army-cry the hostile uttered; the air above was thickened with dying voices. . . . Ocean raged, drew itself up on high, the storms rose, the corpses rolled.'[3]

Is the song of the Exodus more abrupt, more vehement, or more savage? These men can speak of the creation like the Bible, because they speak of destruction like the Bible. They have only to look into their own minds, in order to discover an emotion sufficiently strong to raise their souls to the height of their Creator. This emotion existed

[1] Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 274.
[2] Grein, *Bibliothek der Angelsæchsischen poesie*,
[3] Thorpe, *Cædmon*, 1832, xlvii. p. 206.

already in their pagan legends; and Cædmon, in order to recount the origin of things, has only to turn to the ancient dreams, such as have been preserved in the prophecies of the *Edda*.

'There had not here as yet, save cavern-shade, aught been; but this wide abyss stood deep and dim, strange to its Lord, idle and useless; on which looked with his eyes the King firm of mind, and beheld those places void of joys; saw the dark cloud lower in eternal night, swart under heaven, dark and waste, until this worldly creation through the word existed of the Glory-King. . . . The earth as yet was not green with grass; ocean cover'd, swart in eternal night, far and wide the dusky ways.'[1]

In this manner will Milton hereafter speak, the descendant of the Hebrew seers, last of the Scandinavian seers, but assisted in the development of his thought by all the resources of Latin culture and civilisation. And yet he will add nothing to the primitive sentiment. Religious instinct is not acquired; it belongs to the blood, and is inherited with it. So it is with other instincts; pride in the first place, indomitable self-conscious energy, which sets man in opposition to all domination, and inures him against all grief. Milton's Satan exists already in Cædmon's, as the picture exists in the sketch; because both have their model in the race; and Cædmon found his originals in the northern warriors, as Milton did in the Puritans:

'Why shall I for his favour serve, bend to him in such vassalage? I may be a god as he. Stand by me, strong associates, who will not fail me in the strife. Heroes stern of mood, they have chosen me for chief, renowned warriors! with such may one devise counsel, with such capture his adherents; they are my zealous friends, faithful in their thoughts; I may be their chieftain, sway in this realm; thus to me it seemeth not right that I in aught need cringe to God for any good; I will no longer be his vassal.'[2]

He is overcome; shall he be subdued? He is cast into the 'where torment they suffer, burning heat intense, in midst of hell, fire and broad flames: so also the bitter seeks smoke and darkness;' will he repent? At first he is astonished, he despairs; but it is a hero's despair.

'This narrow place is most unlike that other that we ere knew,[3] high in heaven's kingdom, which my master bestow'd on me. . . . Oh, had I power of my hands, and might one season be without, be one winter's space, then with this host I— But around me lie iron bonds, presseth this cord of chain: I am powerless! me have so hard the clasps of hell, so firmly grasped! Here is a vast fire above and underneath, never did I see a loathlier landskip; the flame abateth not, hot over hell. Me hath the clasping of these rings, this hard-polish'd band, impeded in my

[1] Thorpe, *Cædmon*, ii. p. 7. A likeness exists between this song and corresponding portions of the *Edda*.

[2] *Ibid.* iv. p. 18.

[3] This is Milton's opening also. (See *Paradise Lost*, Book i. verse 242, etc.) One would think that he must have had some knowledge of Cædmon from the translation of Junius.

course, debarr'd me from my way; my feet are bound, my hands manacled, . . . so that with aught I cannot from these limb-bonds escape.'[1]

As there is nothing to be done against God, it is with His new creature, man, that he must busy himself. To him who has lost everything, vengeance is left; and if the conquered can enjoy this, he will find himself happy; 'he will sleep softly, even under his chains.'

VII.

Here the foreign culture ceased. Beyond Christianity it could not graft upon this barbarous stock any fruitful or living branch. All the circumstances which elsewhere softened the wild sap, failed here. The Saxons found Britain abandoned by the Romans; they had not yielded, like their brothers on the continent, to the ascendency of a superior civilisation; they had not become mingled with the inhabitants of the land; they had always treated them like enemies or slaves, pursuing like wolves those who escaped to the mountains of the west, oppressing like beasts of burden those whom they had conquered with the land. While the Germans of Gaul, Italy, and Spain became Romans, the Saxons retained their language, their genius and manners, and created in Britain a Germany outside of Germany. A hundred and fifty years after the Saxon invasion, the introduction of Christianity and the dawn of security attained by a society inclining to peace, gave birth to a kind of literature; and we meet with the venerable Bede, and later on, Alcuin, John Scotus Erigena, and some others, commentators, translators, teachers of barbarians, who tried not to originate but to compile, to pick out and explain from the great Greek and Latin encyclopedia something which might suit the men of their time. But the wars with the Danes came and crushed this humble plant, which, if left to itself, would have come to nothing.[2] When Alfred[3] the Deliverer became king, 'there were very few ecclesiastics,' he says, 'on this side of the Humber, who could understand in English their own Latin prayers, or translate any Latin writing into English. On the other side of the Humber I think there were scarce any; there were so few that, in truth, I cannot remember a single man south of the Thames, when I took the kingdom, who was capable of it.' He tried, like Charlemagne, to instruct his people, and turned into Saxon for their use several works, above all some moral books, as the *de Consolatione* of Boethius; but this very translation bears witness to the bar-

[1] Thorpe, *Cædmon*, iv. p. 23.

[2] They themselves feel their impotence and decrepitude. Bede, dividing the history of the world into six periods, says that the fifth, which stretches from the return out of Babylon to the birth of Christ, is the senile period; the sixth is the present, *ætas decrepita, totius morte sæculi consummanda.*

[3] Died in 901; Adhelm died 709, Bede died 735, Alcuin lived under Charlemagne, Erigena under Charles the Bald (843–877).

barism of his audience. He adapts the text in order to bring it down to their intelligence; the pretty verses of Boethius, somewhat pretentious, laboured, elegant, crowded with classical allusions of a refined and polished style worthy of Seneca, become an artless, long drawn out and yet abrupt prose, like a nurse's fairy tale, explaining everything, recommencing and breaking off its phrases, making ten turns about a single detail; so low was it necessary to stoop to the level of this new intelligence, which had never thought or known anything. Here follows the Latin of Boethius, so affected, so pretty, with the English translation affixed:—

'Quondam funera conjugis
Vates Threicius gemens,
Postquam flebilibus modis
Silvas currere, mobiles
Amnes stare coegerat,
Junxitque intrepidum latus
Sævis cerva leonibus,
Nec visum timuit lepus
Jam cantu placidum canem;
Cum flagrantior intima
Fervor pectoris ureret,
Nec qui cuncta subegerant
Mulcerent dominum modi;
Immites superos querens,
Infernas adiit domos.
Illic blanda sonantibus
Chordis carmina temperans,
Quidquid præcipuis Deæ
Matris fontibus hauserat,
Quod luctus dabat impotens,
Quod luctum geminans amor,
Deflet Tartara commovens,
Et dulci veniam prece
Umbrarum dominos rogat.
Stupet tergeminus novo
Captus carmine janitor;
Quæ sontes agitant metu
Ultrices scelerum Deæ
Jam mœstæ lacrymis madent.
Non Ixionium caput
Velox præcipitat rota,
Et longa site perditus
Spernit flumina Tantalus.
Vultur dum satur est modis
Non traxit Tityi jecur.
Tandem, vincimur, arbiter
Umbrarum miserans ait.
Donemus comitem viro,
Emptam carmine conjugem.

'It happened formerly that there was a harper in the country called Thrace, which was in Greece. The harper was inconceivably good. His name was Orpheus. He had a very excellent wife, called Eurydice. Then began men to say concerning the harper, that he could harp so that the wood moved, and the stones stirred themselves at the sound, and wild beasts would run thereto, and stand as if they were tame; so still, that though men or hounds pursued them, they shunned them not. Then said they, that the harper's wife should die, and her soul should be led to hell. Then should the harper become so sorrowful that he could not remain among the men, but frequented the wood, and sat on the mountains, both day and night, weeping and harping, so that the woods shook, and the rivers stood still, and no hart shunned any lion, nor hare any hound; nor did cattle know any hatred, or any fear of others, for the pleasure of the sound. Then it seemed to the harper that nothing in this world pleased him. Then thought he that he would seek the gods of hell, and endeavour to allure them with his harp, and pray that they would give him back his wife. When he came thither, then should there come towards him the dog of hell, whose name was Cerberus,—he should have three heads,—and began to wag his tail, and play with him for his harping. Then was there also a very horrible gatekeeper, whose name should be Charon. He had also three heads, and he was very old. Then began the harper to beseech him that he would protect him while he was there, and bring him thence again safe. Then did he promise that to him, because he was desirous of the unaccustomed sound. Then went he further until he met the fierce goddesses, whom the common people call Parcæ, of whom they say, that they

Sed lex dona coerceat,
Nec, dum Tartara liquerit,
Fas sit lumina flectere.
Quis legem det amantibus!
Major lex fit amor sibi.
Heu! noctis prope terminos
Orpheus Eurydicem suam
Vidit, perdidit, occidit.
Vos hæc fabula respicit,
Quicunque in superum diem
Mentem ducere quæritis.
Nam qui tartareum in specus
Victus lumina flexerit,
Quidquid præcipuum trahit
Perdit, dum videt inferos.'
Book III. *Metre* 12.

know no respect for any man, but punish every man according to his deeds; and of whom they say, that they control every man's fortune. Then began he to implore their mercy. Then began they to weep with him. Then went he farther, and all the inhabitants of hell ran towards him, and led him to their king; and all began to speak with him, and to pray that which he prayed. And the restless wheel which Ixion, the king of the Lapithæ, was bound to for his guilt, that stood still for his harping. And Tantalus the king, who in this world was immoderately greedy, and whom that same vice of greediness followed there, he became quiet. And the vulture should cease, so that he tore not the liver of Tityus the king, which before therewith tormented him. And all the punishments of the inhabitants of hell were suspended, whilst he harped before the king. When he long and long had harped, then spoke the king of the inhabitants of hell; and said, Let us give the man his wife, for he has earned her by his harping. He then commanded him that he should well observe *that he never looked backwards* after he departed thence; and said, if he looked backwards, that he should lose the woman. But men can with great difficulty, if at all, restrain love! Wellaway! What! Orpheus then led his wife with him till he came to the boundary of light and darkness. Then went his wife after him. When he came forth into the light, then looked he behind his back towards the woman. Then was she immediately lost to him. This fable teaches every man who desires to fly the darkness of hell, and to come to the light of the true good, that he look not about him to his old vices, so that he practise them again as fully as he did before. For whosoever with full will turns his mind to the vices which he had before forsaken, and practises them, and they then fully please him, and he never thinks of forsaking them; then loses he all his former good unless he again amend it.'[1]

One speaks thus when an indistinct idea has to be impressed upon the mind. Boethius had for his audience senators, men of culture, who understood as well as we the slightest mythological allusion. Alfred is obliged to take them up and develop them, like a father or a master, who draws his little boy between his knees, and relates to him names, qualities, crimes and their punishments, which the Latin only hints at. But the ignorance is such that the teacher himself needs correction. He takes the Parcæ for the Erinyes, and gives Charon three heads like Cerberus. There is no adornment in his version; no *finesse* as in the original. Alfred himself has hard work to be understood. What, for instance, becomes of the noble Platonic moral, the apt interpretation after the style of Iamblichus and Porphyry? It is altogether dulled. He has to call everything by its name, and turn the eyes of his people to tangible and visible things. It is a sermon suited to his audience of thanes; the Danes whom he had converted by the sword needed a clear

[1] Fox's *Alfred's Boethius*, chap. 35, § 6, 1864.

moral. If he had translated for them exactly the fine words of Boethius, they would have opened wide their big stupid eyes and fallen asleep.

For the whole talent of an uncultivated mind lies in the force and oneness of its sensations. Beyond that it is powerless. The art of thinking and reasoning lies above it. These men lost all genius when they lost their fever-heat. They spun out awkwardly and heavily dry chronicles, a sort of historical almanacks. You might think them peasants, who, returning from their toil, came and scribbled with chalk on a smoky table the date of a year of scarcity, the price of corn, the changes in the weather, a death. Even so, side by side with the meagre Bible chronicles, which set down the successions of kings, and of Jewish massacres, are exhibited the exaltation of the psalms and the transports of prophecy. The same lyric poet can be at one time a brute and a genius, because his genius comes and goes like a disease, and instead of having it he simply is ruled by it.

'A.D. 611. This year Cynegils succeeded to the government in Wessex, and held it one-and-thirty winters. Cynegils was the son of Ceol, Ceol of Cutha, Cutha of Cynric.

'614. This year Cynegils and Cnichelm fought at Bampton, and slew two thousand and forty-six of the Welsh.

'678. This year appeared the comet-star in August, and shone every morning during three months like a sunbeam. Bishop Wilfrid being driven from his bishopric by King Everth, two bishops were consecrated in his stead.

'901. This year died Alfred, the son of Ethelwulf, six nights before the mass of All Saints. He was king over all the English nation, except that part that was under the power of the Danes. He held the government one year and a half less than thirty winters; and then Edward his son took to the government.

'902. This year there was the great fight at the Holme, between the men of Kent and the Danes.

'1077. This year were reconciled the King of the Franks, and William, King of England. But it continued only a little while. This year was London burned, one night before the Assumption of St. Mary, so terribly as it never was before since it was built.'[1]

It is thus the poor monks speak, with monotonous dryness, who after Alfred's time gather up and take note of great visible events; sparsely scattered we find a few moral reflections, a passionate emotion, nothing more. In the tenth century we see King Edgar give a manor to a bishop, on condition that he will put into Saxon the monastic regulation written in Latin by Saint Benedict. Alfred himself was almost the last man of culture; he, like Charlemagne, became so only by dint of determination and patience. In vain the great spirits of this age endeavour to link themselves to the relics of the old civilisation, and to raise themselves above the chaotic and muddy ignorance in which the others wallow. They rise almost alone, and on their death the rest are again enveloped in the mire. It is the human beast that

[1] All these extracts are taken from Ingram's *Saxon Chronicle*, 1823.

remains master; genius cannot find a place amidst revolt and bloodthirstiness, gluttony and brute force. Even in the little circle where he moves, his labour comes to nought. The model which he proposed to himself oppresses and enchains him in a cramping imitation; he aspires but to be a good copyist; he produces a gathering of centos which he calls Latin verses; he applies himself to the discovery of expressions, sanctioned by good models; he succeeds only in elaborating an emphatic, spoiled Latin, bristling with incongruities. In place of ideas, the most profound amongst them serve up the defunct doctrines of defunct authors. They compile religious manuals and philosophical manuals from the Fathers. Erigena, the most learned, goes to the extent of reproducing the old complicated dreams of Alexandrian metaphysics. How far these speculations and reminiscences soar above the barbarous crowd which howls and bustles in the plain below, no words can express. There was a certain king of Kent in the seventh century who could not write. Imagine bachelors of theology discussing before an audience of waggoners in Paris, not Parisian waggoners, but such as survive in Auvergne or in the Vosges. Among these clerks, who think like studious scholars in accordance with their favourite authors, and are doubly separated from the world as collegians and monks, Alfred alone, by his position as a layman and a practical man, descends in his Saxon translations and his Saxon verses to the common level; and we have seen that his effort, like that of Charlemagne, was fruitless. There was an impassable wall between the old learned literature and the present chaotic barbarism. Incapable, yet compelled, to fit into the ancient mould, they gave it a twist. Unable to reproduce ideas, they reproduced a metre. They tried to eclipse their rivals in versification by the refinement of their composition, and the prestige of a difficulty overcome. So, in our own colleges, the good scholars imitate the clever divisions and symmetries of Claudian rather than the ease and variety of Virgil. They put their feet in irons, and showed their smartness by running in shackles; they weighted themselves with rules of modern rhyme and rules of ancient metre; they added the necessity of beginning each verse with the same letter that began the last. A few, like Adhelm, wrote square acrostics, in which the first line, repeated at the end, was found also to the left and right of the piece. Thus made up of the first and last letters of each verse, it forms a border to the whole piece, and the morsel of verse is like a morsel of tapestry. Strange literary tricks, which changed the poet into an artisan! They bear witness to the contrariety which then impeded culture and nature, and spoiled at once the Latin form and the Saxon genius.

Beyond this barrier, which drew an impassable line between civilisation and barbarism, there was another, no less impassable, between the Latin and Saxon genius. The strong German imagination, in which glowing and obscure visions suddenly meet and violently clash, was

in contrast with the reasoning spirit, in which ideas gather and are developed in a regular order; so that if the barbarian, in his classical essays, retained any part of his primitive instincts, he succeeded only in producing a grotesque and frightful monster. One of them, this very Adhelm, a relative of King Ina, who sang on the town-bridge profane and sacred hymns alternately, too much imbued with Saxon poesy, simply to imitate the antique models, adorned his Latin prose and verse with all the 'English magnificence.'[1] You might compare him to a barbarian who seizes a flute from the skilled hands of a player of Augustus' court, in order to blow on it with inflated lungs, as if it were the bellowing horn of an aurochs. The sober speech of the Roman orators and senators becomes in his hands full of exaggerated and incoherent images; he heaps up his colours, and gives vent to the extraordinary and unintelligible nonsense of the later Skalds,—in short, he is a latinised Skald, dragging into his new tongue the ornaments of Scandinavian poetry, such as alliteration, by dint of which he congregates in one of his epistles fifteen consecutive words, all beginning with the same letter; and in order to make up his fifteen, he introduces a barbarous Græcism amongst the Latin words.[2] Many times amongst the others, the writers of legends, you will meet with deformation of Latin, distorted by the outbreak of a too vivid imagination; it breaks out even in their scholastic and scientific writing. Alcuin, in the dialogues which he made for the son of Charlemagne, uses like formulas the little poetic and trite phrases which abound in the national poetry. 'What is winter? the exile of summer. What is spring? the painter of earth. What is the year? the world's chariot. What is the sun? the splendour of the universe, the beauty of the firmament, the grace of nature, the glory of the day, the distributor of hours. What is the sea? the road of the brave, the frontier of earth, the hostelry of the waves, the source of showers.' More, he ends his instructions with enigmas, in the spirit of the Skalds, such as we still find in the old manuscripts with the barbarian songs. It was the last feature of the national genius, which, when it labours to understand a matter, neglects dry, clear, consecutive deduction, to employ grotesque, remote, oft-repeated imagery, and replaces analysis by intuition.

VIII.

Such was this race, the last born of the sister races, Saxon, Latin,

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[1] William of Malmesbury's expression.

[2] Primitus (pantorum procerum prætorumque pio potissimum paternoque præsertim privilegio) panegyricum poemataque passim prosatori sub polo promulgantes, stridula vocum symphonia ac melodiæ cantile, næque carmine modulaturi hymnizemus.

and Greek, who, in the decay of the other two, brings to the world a new civilisation, with a new character and genius. Inferior to these in many respects, it surpasses them in not a few. Amidst the woods and fens and snows, under a sad, inclement sky, gross instincts have gained the day. The German has not acquired gay humour, unreserved facility, the idea of harmonious beauty; his great phlegmatic body continues fierce and coarse, greedy and brutal; his rude and unpliable mind is still inclined to savagery, and restive under culture. Dull and congealed, his ideas cannot expand with facility and freedom, with a natural sequence and an instinctive regularity. But this spirit, void of the sentiment of the beautiful, is all the more apt for the sentiment of the true. The deep and incisive impression which he receives from contact with objects, and which as yet he can only express by a cry, will afterwards liberate him from the Latin rhetoric, and will vent itself on things rather than on words. Moreover, under the constraint of climate and solitude, by the habit of resistance and effort, his ideal is changed. Human and moral instincts have gained the empire over him; and amongst them, the need of independence, the disposition for serious and strict manners, the inclination for devotion and veneration, the worship of heroism. Here are the foundations and the elements of a civilisation, slower but sounder, less careful of what is agreeable and elegant, more based on justice and truth.[1] Hitherto at least the race is intact, intact in its primitive rudeness; the Roman cultivation could neither develop nor deform it. If Christianity took root, it was owing to natural affinities, but it produced no change in the native genius. Now approaches a new conquest, which is to bring this time men, as well as ideas. The Saxons, meanwhile, after the wont of German races, vigorous and fertile, have within the past six centuries multiplied enormously. They were now about two millions, and the Norman army numbered sixty thousand.[2] In vain these Normans become transformed, gallicised; by their origin, and substantially in themselves they are still the relatives of those whom they conquered. In vain they imported their manners and their poesy, and introduced into the language a third part of its words; this language continues altogether

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[1] In Iceland, the country of the fiercest sea-kings, crimes are unknown; prisons have been turned to other uses; fines are the only punishment.

[2] See *Pictorial History*, i. 249. Following Doomsday Book, Mr. Turner reckons at three hundred thousand the heads of families mentioned. If each family consisted of five persons, that would make one million five hundred thousand people. He adds five hundred thousand for the four northern counties, for London and several large towns, for the monks and provincial clergy not enumerated. . . . We must accept these figures with caution. Still they agree with those of Macintosh, George Chalmers, and several others. Many facts show that the Saxon population was very numerous, and quite out of proportion to the Norman population.

German in element and in substance.[1] Though the grammar changed, it changed integrally, by an internal action, in the same sense as its continental cognates. At the end of three hundred years the conquerors themselves were conquered; their speech became English; and owing to frequent intermarriage, the English blood ended by gaining the predominance over the Norman blood in their veins. The race finally remains Saxon. If the old poetic genius disappears after the Conquest, it is as a river disappears, and flows for a while underground. In five centuries it will emerge once more.

[1] Warton, *History of English Poetry*, 1840, 3 vols., preface.

CHAPTER II.

The Normans.

I. The protection and character of Feudalism.

II. The Norman invasion; character of the Normans—Contrast with the Saxons—The Normans are French—How they became so—Their taste and architecture—Their spirit of inquiry and their literature—Chivalry and amusements—Their tactics and their success.

III. Bent of the French genius—Two principal characteristics; clear and consecutive ideas—Psychological form of French genius—Prosaic histories; lack of colour and passion, ease and discursiveness—Natural logic and clearness, soberness, grace and delicacy, refinement and cynicism—Order and charm—The nature of the beauty and of the ideas which the French have introduced.

IV. The Normans in England—Their position and their tyranny—They implant their literature and language—They forget the same—Learn English by degrees—Gradually English becomes gallicised.

V. They translate French works into English—Opinion of Sir John Mandeville—Layamon, Robert of Gloucester, Robert de Brunne—They imitate in English the French literature—Moral manuals, chansons, fabliaux, Gestes—Brightness, frivolity, and futility of this French literature—Barbarity and ignorance of the feudal civilisation—Geste of Richard Cœur de Lion, and voyages of Sir John Mandeville—Poorness of the literature introduced and implanted in England—Why it has not endured on the Continent or in England.

VI. The Saxons in England—Endurance of the Saxon nation, and formation of the English constitution—Endurance of the Saxon character, and formation of the English character.

VII.-IX. Comparison of the ideal hero in France and England—Fabliaux of Reynard, and ballads of Robin Hood—How the Saxon character makes way for and supports political liberty—Comparison of the condition of the Commons in France and England—Theory of the English constitution, by Sir John Fortescue—How the Saxon constitution makes way for and supports political liberty—Situation of the Church, and precursors of the Reformation in England—Piers Plowman and Wycliffe—How the Saxon character and the situation of the Norman Church make way for religious reform—Incompleteness and importance of the national literature—Why it has not endured.

I.

A CENTURY and a half had passed on the Continent since, amid the universal decay and dissolution, a new society had been formed, and new men had risen up. Brave men had at length made a

league against the Norsemen and the robbers. They had planted their feet in the soil, and the moving chaos of the general subsidence had become fixed by the effort of their great hearts and of their arms. At the mouths of the rivers, in the defiles of the mountains, on the margin of the waste borders, at all perilous passes, they had built their forts, each for himself, each on his own land, each with his faithful band; and they had lived like a scattered but watchful army, camped and confederate in their castles, sword in hand, in front of the enemy. Beneath this discipline a formidable people had been formed, fierce hearts in strong bodies,[1] intolerant of restraint, longing for violent deeds, born for constant warfare because steeped in permanent warfare, heroes and robbers, who, as an escape from their solitude, plunged into adventures, and went, that they might conquer a country or win Paradise, to Sicily, to Portugal, to Spain, to Livonia, to Palestine, to England.

II.

On the 27th of September 1066, at the mouth of the Somme, there was a great sight to be seen: four hundred large sailing vessels, more than a thousand transports, and sixty thousand men were on the point of embarking.[2] The sun shone splendidly after long rain; trumpets sounded, the cries of this armed multitude rose to heaven; on the far horizon, on the shore, in the wide-spreading river, on the sea which opens out thence broad and shining, masts and sails extended like a forest; the enormous fleet set out wafted by the south wind.[3] The people which it carried were said to have come from Norway, and one might have taken them for kinsmen of the Saxons, with whom they were to fight; but there were with them a multitude of adventurers, crowding from every direction, far and near, from north and south, from Maine and Anjou, from Poitou and Brittany, from Ile-de-France and Flanders, from Aquitaine and Burgundy;[4] and, in short, the expedition itself was French.

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[1] See, amidst other delineations of their manners, the first accounts of the first Crusade. Godfrey clove a Saracen down to his waist.—In Palestine, a widow was compelled, up to the age of sixty, to marry again, because no fief could remain without a defender.—A Spanish leader said to his exhausted soldiers after a battle, 'You are too weary and too much wounded, but come and fight with me against this other band; the fresh wounds which we shall receive will make us forget those which we have.' At this time, says the General Chronicle of Spain, kings, counts, and nobles, and all the knights, that they might be ever ready, kept their horses in the chamber where they slept with their wives.

[2] For difference in numbers of the fleet and men, see Freeman, *Hist. of the Norm. Conq.*, 3 vols. 1867, iii. 381, 387.—Tr.

[3] For all the details, see *Anglo-Norman Chronicles*, iii. 4, as quoted by Aug. Thierry. I have myself seen the locality and the country.

[4] Of three columns of attack at Hastings, two were composed of auxiliaries. Moreover, the chroniclers are not at fault upon this critical point; they agree in stating that England was conquered by Frenchmen.

How comes it that, having kept its name, it had changed its nature? and what series of renovations had made a Latin out of a German people? The reason is, that this people, when they came to Neustria, were neither a national body, nor a pure race. They were but a band; and as such, marrying the women of the country, they introduced foreign blood into their children. They were a Scandinavian band, but deteriorated by all the bold knaves and all the wretched desperadoes who wandered about the conquered country;[1] and as such they received the foreign blood into their veins. Moreover, if the nomadic band was mixed, the settled band was much more so; and peace by its transfusions, like war by its recruits, had changed the character of the primitive blood. When Rollo, having divided the land amongst his followers, hung the thieves and their abettors, people from every country gathered to him. Security, good stern justice, were so rare, that they were enough to re-people a land.[2] He invited strangers, say the old writers, 'and made one people out of so many folk of different natures.' This assemblage of barbarians, refugees, robbers, immigrants, spoke Romance or French so quickly, that the second Duke, wishing to have his son taught Danish, had to send him to Bayeux, where it was still spoken. The great masses always form the race in the end, and generally the genius and language. Thus this people, so transformed, quickly became polished; the composite race showed itself of a ready genius, far more wary than the Saxons across the Channel, closely resembling their neighbours of Picardy, Champagne, and Ile-de-France. 'The Saxons,' says an old writer,[3] 'vied with each other in their drinking feats, and wasted their goods by day and night in feasting, whilst they lived in wretched hovels; the French and Normans, on the other hand, living inexpensively in their fine large houses, were besides studiously refined in their food and careful in their habits.' The former, still weighted by the German phlegm, were gluttons and drunkards, now and then aroused by poetical enthusiasm; the latter, made sprightlier by their transplantation and their alloy, felt the cravings of genius already making themselves manifest. 'You might see amongst them churches in every village, and monasteries in the cities, towering on high, and built in a style unknown before,' first in Normandy, and presently in England.[4] Taste had come to them at once—that is, the

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[1] It was a Rouen fisherman, a soldier of Rollo, who killed the Duke of France at the mouth of the Eure. Hastings, the famous sea-king, was a labourer's son from the neighbourhood of Troyes.

[2] 'In the tenth century,' says Stendhal, 'a man wished for two things: 1*st*, not to be slain; 2*d*, to have a good leather coat.' See Fontenelle's *Chronicle*.

[3] William of Malmesbury.

[4] *Pictorial History*, i. 615. Churches in London, Sarum, Norwich, Durham, Chichester, Peterborough, Rochester, Hereford, Gloucester, Oxford, etc.—William of Malmesbury.

desire to please the eye, and to express a thought by outward representation, which was quite a new idea: the circular arch was raised on one or on a cluster of columns; elegant mouldings were placed about the windows; the rose window made its appearance, simple yet, like the flower which gives it its name; and the Norman style unfolded itself, original and measured, between the Gothic style, whose richness it foreshadowed, and the Romance style, whose solidity it recalled.

With taste, just as natural and just as quickly, was developed the spirit of inquiry. Nations are like children; with some the tongue is readily loosened, and they comprehend at once; with others it is loosened with difficulty, and they are slow of comprehension. The men before us had educated themselves nimbly, as Frenchmen do. They were the first in France who unravelled the language, fixing it and writing it so well, that to this day we understand their code and their poems. In a century and a half they were so far cultivated as to find the Saxons 'unlettered and rude.'[1] That was the excuse they made for banishing them from the abbeys and all valuable ecclesiastical posts. And, in fact, this excuse was rational, for they instinctively hated gross stupidity. Between the Conquest and the death of King John, they established five hundred and fifty-seven schools in England. Henry Beauclerk, son of the Conqueror, was trained in the sciences; so were Henry II. and his three sons: Richard, the eldest of these, was a poet. Lanfranc, first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, a subtle logician, ably argued the Real Presence; Anselm, his successor, the first thinker of the age, thought he had discovered a new proof of the existence of God, and tried to make religion philosophical by adopting as his maxim, 'Crede ut intelligas.' The notion was doubtless grand, especially in the eleventh century; and they could not have gone more promptly to work. Of course the science I speak of was but scholastic, and these terrible folios slay more understandings than they confirm. But people must begin as they can; and syllogism, even in Latin, even in theology, is yet an exercise of the mind and a proof of the understanding. Among the continental priests who settled in England, one established a library; another, founder of a school, made the scholars perform the play of Saint Catherine; a third wrote in polished Latin, 'epigrams as pointed as those of Martial.' Such were the recreations of an intelligent race, eager for ideas, of ready and flexible genius, whose clear thought was not overshadowed, like that of the Saxon brain, by drunken conceits, and the vapours of a greedy and well-filled stomach. They loved conversations, tales of adventure. Side by side with their Latin chroniclers, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, men of reflection, who could not only relate, but criticise here and there; there were rhyming chronicles in the vulgar tongue, as those of Geoffroy Gaimar, Bénoît de Sainte-Maure, Robert Wace. Do not imagine that

[1] Ordericus Vitalis.

their verse-writers were sterile of words or lacking in details. They were talkers, tale-tellers, speakers above all, ready of tongue, and never stinted in speech. Not singers by any means; they speak—this is their strong point, in their poems as in their chronicles. One of the earliest wrote the *Song of Roland;* upon this they accumulated a multitude of songs concerning Charlemagne and his knights, concerning Arthur and Merlin, the Greeks and Romans, King Horn, Guy of Warwick, every prince and every people. Their minstrels (*trouvères*), like their knights, draw in abundance from Gauls, Franks, and Latins, and descend upon East and West, in the wide field of adventure. They address themselves to a spirit of inquiry, as the Saxons to enthusiasm, and dilute in their long, clear, and flowing narratives the lively colours of German and Breton traditions; battles, surprises, single combats, embassies, speeches, processions, ceremonies, huntings, a variety of amusing events, employ their ready and adventurous imaginations. At first, in the *Song of Roland*, it is still kept in check; it walks with long strides, but only walks. Presently its wings have grown; incidents are multiplied; giants and monsters abound, the natural disappears, the song of the *jongleur* grows a poem under the hands of the *trouvère;* he would speak, like Nestor of old, five, even six years running, and not grow tired or stop. Forty thousand verses are not too much to satisfy their gabble; a facile mind, abundant, curious, descriptive, is the genius of the race. The Gauls, their fathers, used to delay travellers on the road to make them tell their stories, and boasted, like these, 'of fighting well and talking with ease.'

With chivalric poetry, they are not wanting in chivalry; principally, it may be, because they are strong, and a strong man loves to prove his strength by knocking down his neighbours; but also from a desire of fame, and as a point of honour. By this one word honour the whole spirit of warfare is changed. Saxon poets painted it as a murderous fury, as a blind madness which shook flesh and blood, and awakened the instincts of the beast of prey; Norman poets describe it as a tourney. The new passion which they introduce is that of vanity and gallantry; Guy of Warwick dismounts all the knights in Europe, in order to deserve the hand of the prude and scornful Félice. The tourney itself is but a ceremony, somewhat brutal I admit, since it turns upon the breaking of arms and limbs, but yet brilliant and French. To make a show of cleverness and courage, display the magnificence of dress and armour, be applauded by and please the ladies,—such feelings indicate men of greater sociality, more under the influence of public opinion, less the slaves of their own passions, void both of lyric inspiration and savage enthusiasm, gifted by a different genius, because inclined to other pleasures.

Such were the men who at this moment were disembarking in England to introduce their new manners and a new spirit, French at bottom, in character and speech, though with special and provincial features;

of all the most determined, with an eye on the main chance, calculating, having the nerve and the dash of our own soldiers, but with the tricks and precautions of lawyers; heroic undertakers of profitable enterprises; having travelled in Sicily, in Naples, and ready to travel to Constantinople or Antioch, so it be to take a country or carry off money; sharp politicians, accustomed in Sicily to hire themselves to the highest bidder, and capable of doing a stroke of business in the heat of the Crusade, like Bohémond, who, before Antioch, speculated on the dearth of his Christian allies, and would only open the town to them under condition of their keeping it for himself; methodical and persevering conquerors, expert in administration, and handy at paper-work, like this very William, who was able to organise such an expedition, and such an army, and kept a written roll of the same, and who proceeded to register the whole of England in his Domesday Book. Sixteen days after the disembarkation, the contrast between the two nations was manifested at Hastings by its sensible effects.

The Saxons 'ate and drank the whole night. You might have seen them struggling much, and leaping and singing,' with shouts of laughter and noisy joy.[1] In the morning they crowded behind their palisades the dense masses of their heavy infantry, and with battle-axe hung round their neck awaited the attack. The wary Normans weighed the chances of heaven and hell, and tried to enlist God upon their side. Robert Wace, their historian and compatriot, is no more troubled by poetical imagination than they were by warlike inspiration; and on the eve of the battle his mind is as prosaic and clear as theirs.[2] The same spirit showed in the battle. They were for the most part bowmen and horsemen, well-skilled, nimble, and clever. Taillefer, the *jòngleur*, who asked for the honour of striking the first blow, went singing, like a true French volunteer, performing tricks all the

[1] Robert Wace, *Roman du Rou.*

[2] *Ibid.* Et li Normanz et li Franceiz
Tote nuit firent oreisons,
Et furent en aflicions.
De lor péchiés confèz se firent
As proveires les regehirent,
Et qui n'en out proveires prèz,
A son veizin se fist confèz,
Pour ço ke samedi esteit
Ke la bataille estre debveit.
Unt Normanz a pramis e voé,
Si com li cler l'orent loé,
Ke à ce jor mez s'il veskeient,
Char ni saunc ne mangereient
Giffrei, éveske de Coustances,
A plusors joint lor pénitances.
Cli reçut li confessiqns
Et dona li béneiçons.

while.[1] Having arrived before the English, he cast his lance three times in the air, then his sword, and caught them again by the handle; and Harold's clumsy foot-soldiers, who only knew how to cleave coats of mail by blows from their battle-axes, 'were astonished, saying to one another that it was magic.' As for William, amongst a score of prudent and cunning actions, he performed two well-calculated ones, which, in this sore embarrassment, brought him safe out of his difficulties. He ordered his archers to shoot into the air; the arrows wounded many of the Saxons in the face, and one of them pierced Harold in the eye. After this he simulated flight; the Saxons, intoxicated with joy and wrath, quitted their entrenchments, and exposed themselves to the lances of the knights. During the remainder of the contest they only make a stand by small companies, fight with fury, and end by being slaughtered. The strong, mettlesome, brutal race threw themselves on the enemy like a savage bull; the dexterous Norman hunters wounded them, subdued, and drove them under the yoke.

III.

What then is this French race, which by arms and letters makes

[1] Robert Wace, *Roman du Rou:*

Taillefer ki moult bien cantout
Sur un roussin qui tot alout
Devant li dus alont cantant
De Kalermaine e de Rolant,
E d'Oliver et des vassals
Ki moururent à Roncevals.
Quant ils orent chevalchié tant
K'as Engleis vindrent aprismant :
'Sires ! dist Taillefer, merci !
Je vos ai languement servi.
Tut mon servise me debvez,
Hui, si vos plaist, me le rendez
Por tout guerredun vos requier,
Et si vos voil forment preier,
Otreiez-mei, ke jo n'i faille,
Li primier colp de la bataille.'
Et li dus répont : 'Je l'otrei.'
Et Taillefer point à desrei ;
Devant toz li altres se mist,
Un Englez féri, si l'ocist.
De sos le pis, parmie la pance,
Li fist passer ultre la lance,
A terre estendu l'abati.
Poiz trait l'espée, altre féri.
Poiz a crié : 'Venez, venez !
Ke fetes-vos ? Férez, férez !'
Donc l'unt Englez avironé,
Al secund colp k'il ou doné.

such a splendid entrance upon the world, and is so manifestly destined to rule, that in the East, for example, their name of Franks will be given to all the nations of the West? Wherein consists this new spirit, this precocious pioneer, this key of all middle-age civilisation? There is in every mind of the kind a fundamental activity which, when incessantly repeated, moulds its plan, and gives it its direction; in town or country, cultivated or not, in its infancy and its age, it spends its existence and employs its energy in conceiving an event or an object. This is its original and perpetual process; and whether it change its region, return, advance, prolong, or alter its course, its whole motion is but a series of consecutive steps; so that the least alteration in the length, quickness, or precision of its primitive stride transforms and regulates the whole course, as in a tree the structure of the first shoot determines the whole foliage, and governs the whole growth.[1] When the Frenchman conceives an event or an object, he conceives quickly and distinctly; there is no internal disturbance, no previous fermentation of confused and violent ideas, which, becoming concentrated and elaborated, end in a noisy outbreak. The movement of his intelligence is nimble and prompt like that of his limbs; at once and without effort he seizes upon his idea. But he seizes that alone: he leaves on one side all the long entangling offshoots whereby it is entwined and twisted amongst its neighbouring ideas; he does not embarrass himself with nor think of them; he detaches, plucks, touches but slightly, and that is all. He is deprived, or if you prefer it, he is exempt from those sudden half-visions which disturb a man, and open up to him instantaneously vast deeps and far perspectives. Images are excited by internal commotion; he, not being so moved, imagines not. He is only moved superficially; he is without large sympathy; he does not perceive an object as it is, complex and combined, but in parts, with a discursive and superficial knowledge. That is why no race in Europe is less poetical. Let us look at their epics; none are more prosaic. They are not wanting in number: *The Song of Roland, Garin le Loherain, Ogier le Danois,*[2] *Berthe aux grands Pieds.* There is a library of them. Though their manners are heroic and their spirit fresh, though they have originality, and deal with grand events, yet, spite of this, the narrative is as dull as that of the babbling Norman chroniclers. Doubtless Homer is precisely like them; but his magnificent titles of rosy-fingered Morn, the wide-bosomed Air, the divine and nourishing Earth, the earth-shaking Ocean, come in every instant and expand their purple tint over the speeches and battles, and the grand abounding similes which intersperse the narrative tell of a people more inclined to rejoice in beauty than to proceed straight to fact. But here we have facts, always facts, nothing but facts: the Frenchman wants to

[1] The idea of types is applicable throughout all physical and moral nature.

[2] *Danois* is a contraction of *le d'Ardennois*, from the Ardennes.—Tr.

know if the hero will kill the traitor, the lover wed the maiden; he must not be delayed by poetry or painting. He advances nimbly to the end of the story, not lingering for dreams of the heart or wealth of landscape. There is no splendour, no colour, in his narrative; his style is quite bare, and without figures; you may read ten thousand verses in these old poems without meeting one. Shall we open the most ancient, the most original, the most eloquent, at the most moving point, the *Song of Roland*, when Roland is dying? The narrator is moved, and yet his language remains the same, smooth, accentless, so penetrated by the prosaic spirit, and so void of the poetic! He gives an abstract of motives, a summary of events, a series of causes for grief, a series of causes for consolation.[1] Nothing more. These men regard the circumstance or the action by itself, and adhere to this view. Their idea remains exact, clear, and simple, and does not raise up a similar image to be confused with itself, to colour or transform itself. It remains dry; they conceive the divisions of the object one by one, without ever collecting them, as the Saxons would, in a rude, impassioned, glowing fantasy. Nothing is more opposed to their genius than the genuine songs and profound hymns, such as the English monks were singing beneath the low vaults of their churches. They would be disconcerted by the unevenness and obscurity of such language. They

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[1] Genin, *Chanson de Roland:*

Co sent Rollans que la mort le trespent,
Devers la teste sur le quer li descent;
Desuz un pin i est alet curant,
Sur l'herbe verte si est culchet adenz;
Desuz lui met l'espée et l'olifan;
Turnat sa teste vers la païene gent;
Pour ço l'at fait que il voelt veirement
Que Carles diet e trestute sa gent,
Li gentilz quens, qu'il fut mort cunquérant.
Cleimet sa culpe, e menut e suvent,
Pur ses pecchez en puroffrid lo guant.
Li quens Rollans se jut desuz un pin,
Envers Espaigne en ad turnet sun vis,
De plusurs choses a remembrer le prist.
De tantes terres cume li bers cunquist,
De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,
De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l'nurrit.
Ne poet muer n'en plurt et ne susprit.
Mais lui meisme ne volt mettre en ubli.
Cleimet sa culpe, si priet Dieu mercit:
'Veire paterne, ki unques ne mentis,
Seint Lazaron de mort resurrexis,
Et Daniel des lions guaresis,
Guaris de mei l'arome de tuz perilz,
Pur les pecchez que en ma vie fis.'

are not capable of such an access of enthusiasm and such excess of emotions. They never cry out, they speak, or rather they converse, and that at moments when the soul, overwhelmed by its trouble, might be expected to cease thinking and feeling. Thus Amis, in a mystery-play, being leprous, calmly requires his friend Amille to slay his two sons, in order that their blood should heal him of his leprosy; and Amille replies still more calmly.[1] If ever they try to sing, even in heaven, 'a roundelay high and clear,' they will produce little rhymed arguments, as dull as the dullest conversations.[2] Pursue this literature to its conclusion; regard it, like the Skalds, at the time of its decadence, when its vices, being exaggerated, display, like the Skalds, with marked coarseness the kind of mind which produced them. The Skalds fall off into nonsense; it loses itself into babble and platitude. The Saxon could not master his craving for exaltation; the Frenchman could not restrain the volubility of his tongue. He is too diffuse and too clear; the Saxon is too obscure and brief. The one was excessively agitated and carried away; the other explains and develops without measure. From the twelfth century the Gestes degenerate into rhapsodies and psalmodies of thirty or forty thousand verses. Theology enters into them; poetry becomes an interminable, intolerable litany, where the ideas, developed and repeated

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Sun destre guant à Deu en puroffrit.
Seint Gabriel de sa main l'ad pris.
Desur sun bras teneit le chef enclin,
Juntes ses mains est alet à sa fin.
Deus i tramist sun angle cherubin,
Et seint Michel qu'on cleimet del péril ...
Ensemble ad els seint Gabriel i vint,
L'anme del cunte portent en pareis.

[1] Mon très-chier ami débonnaire,
Vous m'avez une chose ditte
Qui n'est pas à faire petite
Mais que l'on doit moult resongnier.
Et nonpourquant, sanz eslongnier,
Puisque garison autrement
Ne povez avoir vraiement,
Pour vostre amour les occiray,
Et le sang vous apporteray.

[2] Vraiz Diex, moult est excellente,
Et de grant charité plaine,
Vostre bonté souveraine.
Car vostre grâce présente,
A toute personne humaine,
Vraix Diex, moult est excellente,
Puisqu'elle a cuer et entente,
Et que à ce desir l'amaine
Que de vous servir se paine.

ad infinitum, without an outburst of emotion nor an accent of originality, flow like a clear and insipid stream, and send off their reader, by dint of their monotonous rhymes, into a comfortable slumber. What a deplorable abundance of distinct and facile ideas! We meet with it again in the seventeenth century, in the literary gossip which took place at the feet of men of distinction; it is the fault and the talent of the race. With this involuntary art of conceiving, and isolating instantaneously and clearly each part of every object, people can speak, even for speaking's sake, and for ever.

Such is the primitive process; how will it be continued? Here appears a new trait in the French genius, the most valuable of all. It is necessary to comprehension that the second idea shall be continuous with the first; otherwise that genius is thrown out of its course and arrested: it cannot proceed by irregular bounds; it must walk step by step, on a straight road; order is innate in it; without study, and at first approach, it disjoints and decomposes the object or event, however complicated and entangled it may be, and sets the parts one by one in succession to each other, according to their natural connection. True, it is still in a state of barbarism; yet intelligence is a reasoning faculty, which spreads, though unwittingly. Nothing is more clear than the style of the old French narrative and of the earliest poems: we do not perceive that we are following a narrator, so easy is the gait, so even the road he opens to us, so smoothly and gradually every idea glides into the next; and this is why he narrates so well. The chroniclers Villehardouin, Joinville, Froissart, the fathers of prose, have an ease and clearness approached by none, and beyond all, a charm, a grace, which they had not to go out of their way to find. Grace is a national possession in France, and springs from the native delicacy which has a horror of incongruities; the instinct of Frenchmen avoids violent shocks in works of taste as well as in works of argument; they desire that their sentiments and ideas shall harmonise, and not clash. Throughout they have this measured spirit, exquisitely refined.[1] They take care, on a sad subject, not to push emotion to its limits; they avoid big words. Think how Joinville relates in six lines the death of the poor sick priest who wished to finish celebrating the mass, and 'never more did sing, and died.' Open a mystery-play—*Théophile, the Queen of Hungary*, for instance: when they are going to burn her and her child, she says two short lines about 'this gentle dew which is so pure an innocent,' naught beside. Take a fabliau, even a dramatic one: when the penitent knight, who has undertaken to fill a barrel with his tears, dies in the hermit's company, he asks from him only one last gift: 'Do but put thy arms on me, and then I'll die embraced by thee.' Could a more touching sentiment be expressed in more sober language? One has to say of their poetry what is said of certain

[1] See H. Taine, *La Fontaine and his Fables*, p. 15.

pictures: This is made out of nothing. Is there in the world anything more delicately graceful than the verses of Guillaume de Lorris? Allegory clothes his ideas so as to dim their too great brightness; ideal figures, half transparent, float about the lover, luminous, yet in a cloud, and lead him amidst all the sweets of delicate-hued ideas to the rose, of which 'the gentle odour embalms all the plain.' This refinement goes so far, that in Thibaut of Champagne and in Charles of Orléans it turns to affectation and insipidity. In them impressions grow more slender; the perfume is so weak, that one often fails to catch it; on their knees before their lady they whisper their waggeries and conceits; they love politely and wittily; they arrange ingeniously in a bouquet their 'painted words,' all the flowers of 'fresh and beautiful language;' they know how to mark fleeting ideas in their flight, soft melancholy, uncertain reverie; they are as elegant as eloquent, and as charming as the most amiable abbés of the eighteenth century. This lightness of touch is proper to the race, and appears as plainly under the armour and amid the massacres of the middle ages as amid the salutations and the musk-scented, wadded clothes of the last court. You will find it in their colouring as in their sentiments. They are not struck by the magnificence of nature, they see only her pretty side; they paint the beauty of a woman by a single feature, which is only polite, saying, 'She is more gracious than the rose in May.' They do not experience the terrible emotion, ravishment, sudden oppression of heart which is displayed in the poetry of neighbouring nations; they say directly, 'She began to smile, which vastly became her.' They add, when they are in a descriptive humour, 'that she had a sweet and perfumed breath,' and a body 'white as new-fallen snow on a branch.' They do not aspire higher; beauty pleases, but does not transport them. They delight in agreeable emotions, but are not fitted for deep sensations. The full rejuvenescence of being, the warm air of spring which renews and penetrates all existence, suggests but a pleasing couplet; they remark in passing, 'Now is winter gone, the hawthorn blossoms, the rose expands,' and so pass on about their business. It is a light pleasure, soon gone, like that which an April landscape affords. For an instant the author glances at the mist of the streams rising about the willow trees, the pleasant vapour which imprisons the brightness of the morning; then, humming a burden of a song, he returns to his narrative. He seeks amusement, and herein lies his power.

In life, as in literature, it is pleasure he aims at, not sensual pleasure or emotion. He is gay, not voluptuous; dainty, not a glutton. He takes love for a pastime, not for an intoxication. It is a pretty fruit which he plucks, tastes, and leaves. And we must remark yet further, that the best of the fruit in his eyes is the fact of its being forbidden. He says to himself that he is duping a husband, that 'he deceives a cruel woman, and thinks he ought to obtain

a pope's indulgence for the deed.'[1] He wishes to be merry—it is the state he prefers, the end and aim of his life; and especially to laugh at another's expense. The short verse of his fabliaux gambols and leaps like a schoolboy released from school, over all things respected or respectable; criticising the church, women, the great, the monks. Scoffers, banterers, our fathers have abundance of the same expressions and things; and the thing comes to them so naturally, that without culture, and surrounded by coarseness, they are as delicate in their raillery as the most refined. They touch upon ridicule lightly, they mock without emphasis, as it were innocently; their style is so harmonious, that at first sight we make a mistake, and do not see any harm in it. They seem artless; they look so very demure; only a word shows the imperceptible smile: it is the ass, for example, which they call the high priest, by reason of his padded cassock and his serious air, and who gravely begins 'to play the organ.' At the close of the history, the delicate sense of comicality has touched you, though you cannot say how. They do not call things by their name, especially in love matters; they let you guess it; they suppose you to be as sharp of intellect and as wary as themselves.[2] Be sure that one might discriminate, embellish at times, even refine upon them, but that their first traits are incomparable. When the fox approaches the raven to steal the cheese, he begins as a hypocrite, piously and cautiously, and as one of the family. He calls the raven his 'good father Don Robart, who sings so well;' he praises his voice, 'so sweet and fine.' 'You would be the best singer in the world if you beware of nuts.' Renard is a Scapin, an artist in the way of invention, not a mere glutton; he loves roguery for its own sake; he rejoices in his superiority, and draws out his mockery. When Tibert, the cat, by his counsel hung himself at the bell rope, wishing to ring it, he uses irony, smacks his lips and pretends to wax impatient against the poor fool whom he has caught, calls him proud, complains because the other does not answer, and because he wishes to rise to the clouds and visit the saints. And from beginning to end this long epic is the same; the raillery never ceases, and never fails to be agreeable. Renard has so much wit, that he is pardoned for everything. The necessity for laughter is national—so indigenous to the French, that a stranger cannot understand, and is shocked by it. This pleasure does not resemble physical joy in any respect, which is to be despised for its grossness; on the contrary, it sharpens the intelligence, and brings to light many a delicate and suggestive idea. The fabliaux are full of truths about men, and still more about women, about low conditions, and still more about high; it is

[1] La Fontaine, *Contes, Richard Minutolo.*

[2] Parler lui veut d'une besogne
Où crois que peu conquerrérois
Si la besogne vous nommois.

a method of philosophising by stealth and boldly, in spite of conventionalism, and in opposition to the powers that be. This taste has nothing in common either with open satire, which is hideous because it is cruel; on the contrary, it provokes good humour. One soon sees that the jester is not ill-disposed, that he does not wish to wound: if he stings, it is as a bee, without venom; an instant later he is not thinking of it; if need be, he will take himself as an object of his pleasantry; all he wishes is to keep up in himself and in us sparkling and pleasing ideas. Do we not see here in advance an abstract of the whole French literature, the incapacity for great poetry, the quick and durable perfection of prose, the excellence of all the moods of conversation and eloquence, the reign and tyranny of taste and method, the art and theory of development and arrangement, the gift of being measured, clear, amusing, and pungent? We have taught Europe how ideas fall into order, and which ideas are agreeable; and this is what our Frenchmen of the eleventh century are about to teach their Saxons during five or six centuries, first with the lance, next with the stick, next with the birch.

IV.

Consider, then, this Frenchman or Norman, this man from Anjou or Maine, who in his well-closed coat of mail, with sword and lance, came to seek his fortune in England. He took the manor of some slain Saxon, and settled himself in it with his soldiers and comrades, gave them land, houses, the right of levying taxes, on condition of their fighting under him and for him, as men-at-arms, marshals, standard-bearers; it was a league in case of danger. In fact, they were in a hostile and conquered country, and they have to maintain themselves. Each one hastened to build for himself a place of refuge, castle or fortress,[1] well fortified, of solid stone, with narrow windows, strengthened with battlements, garrisoned by soldiers, pierced with loopholes. Then these men went to Salisbury, to the number of sixty thousand, all holders of land, having at least enough to support a complete horse or armour. There, placing their hands in William's, they promised him fealty and assistance; and the king's edict declared that they must be all united and bound together like brothers in arms, to defend and succour each other. They are an armed colony, and encamped in their dwellings, like the Spartans amongst the Helots; and they make laws accordingly. When a Frenchman is found dead in any district, the inhabitants are to give up the murderer, unless they pay forty-seven marks as compensation; if the dead man is English, it rests with the people of the place to prove it by the oath of four near relatives of the deceased. They are to beware of killing a stag, boar, or fawn; for an offence against the forest-laws they will lose their eyes. They have nothing of all their property assured

[1] At King Stephen's death there were 1115 castles.

to them except as alms, or on condition of tribute, or by taking the oath of homage. Here a free Saxon proprietor is made a body-slave on his own estate.[1] Here a noble and rich Saxon lady feels on her shoulder the weight of the hand of a Norman valet, who is become by force her husband or her lover. There were Saxons of one sou, or of two sous, according to the sum which they brought to their masters; they sold them, hired them, worked them on joint account, like an ox or an ass. One Norman abbot has his Saxon predecessors dug up, and their bones thrown without the gates. Another keeps men-at-arms, who reduce the recalcitrant monks to reason by blows of their swords. Imagine, if you can, the pride of these new lords, conquerors, strangers, masters, nourished by habits of violent activity, and by the savagery, ignorance, and passions of feudal life. 'They thought they might do whatsoever they pleased,' say the old chroniclers. 'They shed blood indiscriminately, snatched the morsel of bread from the mouth of the wretched, and seized upon all the money, the goods, the land.'[2] Thus 'all the folk in the low country were at great pains to seem humble before Ives Taillebois, and only to address him with one knee on the ground; but although they made a point of paying him every honour, and giving him all and more than all which they owed him in the way of rent and service, he harassed, tormented, tortured, imprisoned them, set his dogs upon their cattle, . . . broke the legs and backbones of their beasts of burden, . . . and sent men to attack their servants on the road with sticks and swords.' The Normans would not and could not borrow any idea or custom from such boors;[3] they despised them as coarse and stupid. They stood amongst them, as the Spaniards amongst the Americans in the sixteenth century, superior in force and culture, more versed in letters, more expert in the arts of luxury. They preserved their manners and their speech. England, to all outward appearance—the court of the king, the castles of the nobles, the palaces of the bishops, the houses of the wealthy—was French; and the Scandinavian people, of whom sixty years ago the Saxon kings used to have poems sung to them, thought that the nation had forgotten its language, and treated it in their laws as though it were no longer their sister.

It was then a French literature which was at this time domiciled across the Channel,[4] and the conquerors tried to make it purely French, purged from all Saxon alloy. They made such a point of this, that the nobles in the reign of Henry II. sent their sons to France, to pre-

[1] A. Thierry, *Histoire de la Conquête de l'Angleterre*, ii.

[2] William of Malmesbury. A. Thierry, ii. 20, 122–203.

[3] 'In the year 652,' says Warton, i. 3, 'it was the common practice of the Anglo-Saxons to send their youth to the monasteries of France for education; and not only the language but the manners of the French were esteemed the most polite accomplishments.'

[4] Warton, i. 5.

serve them from barbarisms. 'For two hundred years,' says Higden,[1] 'children in scole, agenst the usage and manir of all other nations beeth compelled for to leve hire own langage, and for to construe hir lessons and hire thynges in Frensche.' The statutes of the universities obliged the students to converse either in French or Latin. 'Gentilmen children beeth taught to speke Frensche from the tyme that they bith rokked in hire cradell; and uplondissche men will likne himself to gentylmen, and fondeth with greet besynesse for to speke Frensche.' Of course the poetry is French. The Norman brought his minstrel with him; there was Taillefer, the *jongleur*, who sang the *Song of Roland* at the battle of Hastings; there was Adeline, the *jongleuse*, who received an estate in the partition which followed the Conquest. The Norman who ridiculed the Saxon kings, who dug up the Saxon saints, and cast them without the walls of the church, loved none but French ideas and verses. It was into French verse that Robert Wace rendered the legendary history of the England which was conquered, and the actual history of the Normandy in which he continued to live. Enter one of the abbeys where the minstrels come to sing, 'where the clerks after dinner and supper read poems, the chronicles of kingdoms, the wonders of the world,'[2] you will only find Latin or French verses, Latin or French prose. What becomes of English? Obscure, despised, we hear it no more, except in the mouths of degraded franklins, outlaws of the forest, swineherds, peasants, the lowest orders. It is no longer, or scarcely written; gradually we find in the Saxon chronicle that the idiom alters, is extinguished; the chronicle itself ceases within a century after the Conquest.[3] The people who have leisure or security enough to read or write are French; for them authors devise and compose; literature always adapts itself to the taste of those who can appreciate and pay for it. Even the English[4] endeavour to write in French: thus Robert Grostête, in his allegorical poem on Christ; Peter Langtoft, in his *Chronicle of England*, and in his *Life of Thomas à Becket;* Hugh de Rotheland, in his poem of *Hippomedon;* John Hoveden, and many others. Several write the first half of the verse in English, and the second in French; a strange sign of the ascendency which is moulding and oppressing them. Still, in the fifteenth century,[5] many of these poor folk are employed in this task; French is the language of the court, from it arose all poetry and elegance; he is

[1] Trevisa's translation of the *Polycronycon.*

[2] Statutes of foundation of New College, Oxford. In the abbey of Glastonbury, in 1247: *Liber de excidio Trojæ, gesta Ricardi regis, gesta Alexandri Magni, etc.* In the abbey of Peterborough: *Amys et Amelion, Sir Tristam, Guy de Bourgogne, gesta Otuclis, les prophéties de Merlin, le Charlemagne de Turpin, la destruction de Troie, etc.* Warton, *ibidem.*

[3] In 1154.

[4] Warton, i. 72–78.

[5] In 1400. Warton, ii. 248. Gower died in 1408; his French ballads belong to the end of the fourteenth century.

but a clodhopper who is inapt at that style. They apply themselves to it as our old writers did to Latin verses; they are gallicised as those were latinised, by constraint, with a sort of fear, knowing well that they are but scholars and provincials. Gower, one of their best poets, at the end of his French works, excuses himself humbly for not having 'de Français la faconde. Pardonnez moi,' he says, 'que de ce je forsvoie; je suis Anglais.'

And yet, after all, neither the race nor the tongue has perished. It is necessary that the Norman should learn English, in order to command his serfs; his Saxon wife speaks it to him, and his sons receive it from the lips of their nurse; the contagion is strong, for he is obliged to send them to France, to preserve them from the jargon which on his domain threatens to overwhelm and spoil them. From generation to generation the contagion spreads; they breathe it in the air, with the foresters in the chase, the farmers in the field, the sailors on the ships: for these rough people, shut in by their animal existence, are not the kind to learn a foreign language; by the simple weight of their dulness they impose their idiom, at all events such as pertains to living terms. Scholarly speech, the language of law, abstract and philosophical expressions,—in short, all words depending on reflection and culture may be French, since there is nothing to prevent it. This is just what happens; these kind of ideas and this kind of speech are not understood by the commonalty, who, not being able to touch them, cannot change them. This produces a French, a colonial French, doubtless perverted, pronounced with closed mouth, with a contortion of the organs of speech, 'after the school of Stratford-atte-Bow;' yet it is still French. On the other hand, as regards the speech employed about common actions and sensible objects, it is the people, the Saxons, who fix it; these living words are too firmly rooted in his experience to allow of his removing them, and thus the whole substance of the language comes from him. Here, then, we have the Norman who, slowly and constrainedly, speaks and understands English, a deformed, gallicised English, yet English, vigorous and original; but he has taken his time about it, for it has required two centuries. It was only under Henry III. that the new tongue is complete, with the new constitution, and that, after the like fashion, by alliance and intermixture; the burgesses come to take their seats in Parliament with the nobles, at the same time that Saxon words settle down in the language side by side with French words.

V.

So was modern English formed, by compromise, and the necessity of being understood. But one can well imagine that these nobles, even while speaking the growing dialect, have their hearts full of French tastes and ideas; France remains the land of their genius, and the literature which now begins, is but translation. Translators, copyists,

imitators—there is nothing else. England is a distant province, which is to France what the United States were, thirty years ago, to Europe: she exports her wool, and imports her ideas. Open the *Voyage and Travaile of Sir John Maundeville*,[1] the oldest prose-writer, the Villehardouin of the country: his book is but the translation of a translation.[2] He writes first in Latin, the language of scholars; then in French, the language of society; finally he reflects, and discovers that the barons, his compatriots, by governing the rustic Saxons, have ceased to speak their own Norman, and that the rest of the nation never knew it; he translates his book into English, and, in addition, takes care to make it plain, feeling that he speaks to less expanded understandings. He says in French:

'Il advint une fois que Mahomet allait dans une chapelle où il y avait un saint ermite. Il entra en la chapelle où il y avait une petite huisserie et basse, et était bien petite la chapelle; et alors devint la porte si grande qu'il semblait que ce fut la porte d'un palais.'

He stops, recollects himself, wishes to explain himself better for his readers across the Channel, and says in English:

'And at the Desertes of Arabye, he wente in to a Chapelle where a Eremyte duelte. And whan he entred in to the Chapelle that was but a lytille and a low thing, and had but a lytill Dore and a low, than the Entree began to wexe so gret and so large, and so highe, as though it had ben of a gret Mynstre, or the Zate of a Paleys.'[3]

You perceive that he amplifies, and thinks himself bound to clinch and drive in three or four times in succession the same idea, in order to get it into an English brain; his thought is drawn out, dulled, spoiled in the process. So that, being all a copy, the new literature is mediocre, and repeats that which went before, with fewer merits and greater faults.

Let us see, then, what our Norman baron gets translated for him: first, the chronicles of Geoffroy Gaimar and Robert Wace, which con-

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[1] He wrote in 1356, and died in 1372.

[2] 'And for als moche as it is longe time passed that ther was no generalle Passage ne Vyage over the See, and many Men desiren for to here speke of the holy Lond, and han thereof gret Solace and Comfort, I, John Maundevylle, Knyght, alle be it I be not worthi, that was born in Englond, in the town of Seynt-Albones, passed the See in the Zeer of our Lord Jesu-Crist 1322, in the Day of Seynt Michelle, and hidreto have been longe tyme over the See, and have seyn and gon thorghe manye dyverse londes, and many Provynces, and Kingdomes, and Iles.

'And zee shulle undirstonde that I have put this Boke out of Latyn into Frensche, and translated it azen out of Frensche into Englysshe, that every Man of my Nacioun may undirstonde it.'—*Sir John Maundeville's Voyage and Travaile*, ed. Halliwell, 1866, prologue, p. 4.

[3] *Ibid.* xii. p. 139. It is confessed that the original on which Wace depended for his ancient *History of England* is the Latin compilation of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

sist of the fabulous history of England continued up to their day, a dull-rhymed rhapsody, turned into English in a rhapsody no less dull. The first Englishman who attempts it is Layamon,[1] a monk of Ernely, still fettered in the old idiom, who sometimes happens to rhyme, sometimes fails, altogether barbarous and childish, unable to develop a continuous idea, babbling in little confused and incomplete phrases, after the fashion of the ancient Saxon; after him a monk, Robert of Gloucester, and a canon, Robert of Brunne, both as insipid and clear as their French models, having become gallicised, and adopted the significant characteristic of the race, namely, the faculty and habit of easy narration, and seeing moving spectacles without deep emotion, of writing prosaic poetry, of discoursing and developing, of believing that phrases ending in the same sounds form real poetry. Our honest English versifiers, like their preceptors in Normandy and Ile-de-France, garnished with rhymes their dissertations and histories, and called them poems. At this epoch, in fact, on the Continent, the whole learning of the schools descends into the street; and Jean de Meung, in his poem

[1] Extract from the account of the proceedings at Arthur's coronation given by Layamon, in his translation of Wace, executed about 1180. Madden's *Layamon*, 1847, ii. p. 625, *et passim*:

Tha the king igeten hafde
And al his mon-weorede,
Tha bugen ut of burhge
Theines swithe balde.
Alle tha kinges,
And heore here-thringes.
Alle tha biscopes,
And alle tha clærckes,
All the eorles,
And alle tha beornes.
Alle tha theines,
Alle the sweines,
Feire iscrudde,
Helde geond felde.
Summe heo gunnen æruen,
Summe heo gunnen urnen,
Summe heo gunnen lepen,
Summe heo gunnen sceoten,
Summe heo wræstleden
And wither-gome makeden,
Summe heo on uelde
Pleouweden under scelde,
Summe heo driven balles
Wide geond tha feldes.
Monianes kunnes gomen
Ther heo gunnen driuen.
And wha swa mihte iwinne
Wurthscipe of his gomene,

of *la Rose*, is the most tedious of doctors. So in England, Robert of Brunne transposes into verse the *Manuel des Péchés* of Bishop Grostête; Adam Davie,[1] certain Scripture histories; Hampole[2] composes the *Pricke of Conscience*. The titles alone make one yawn; what of the text?

'Mankynde mad ys to do Goddus wylle,
And alle Hys byddyngus to fulfille;
For of al Hys makyng more and les,
Man most principal creature es.
Al that He made for man hit was done,
As ye schal here after sone.'[3]

There is a poem! You did not think so; call it a sermon, if you will give it its proper name. It goes on, well divided, well prolonged, flowing and hollow; the literature which contains and resembles it bears witness of its origin by its loquacity and its clearness.

It bears witness to it by other and more agreeable features. Here and there we find divergences more or less awkward into the domain of genius; for instance, a ballad full of quips against Richard, King of the Romans, who was taken at the battle of Lewes. Moreover, charm is not lacking, nor sweetness either. No one has ever spoken so lively and so well to the ladies as the French of the Continent, and they have not quite forgotten this talent while settling in England. You perceive it readily in the manner in which they celebrate the Virgin. Nothing could be more different from the Saxon sentiment, which is altogether biblical, than the chivalric adoration of the sovereign Lady, the fascinating Virgin and Saint, who was the real deity of the middle ages. It breathes in this pleasing hymn:

Hine me ladde mid songe
At foren than leod kinge;
And the king, for his gomene,
Gaf him geven gode.
Alle tha quene
The icumen weoren there,
And alle tha lafdies,
Leoneden geond walles,
To bihalden the dugethen,
And that folc plæie.
This ilæste threo dæges,
Swulc gomes and swulc plæges,
Tha, at than veorthe dæie
The king gon to spekene
And agæf his goden cnihten
All heore rihten;
He gef seolver, he gæf gold,
He gef hors, he gef lond,
Castles, and clœthes eke;
His monnen he iquende.

[1] About 1312. [2] About 1349. [3] Warton, ii. 36.

'Blessed beo thu, lavedi,
Ful of hovene blisse;
Swete flur of parais,
Moder of milternisse. . . .
I-blessed beo thu, Lavedi,
So fair and so briht;
Al min hope is uppon the,
Bi day and bi nicht. . . .
Bricht and scene quen of storre,
So me liht and lere.
In this false fikele world,
So me led and steore.'[1]

There is but a short and easy step between this tender worship of the Virgin and the sentiments of the court of love. The English rhymesters take it; and when they wish to praise their earthly mistresses, they borrow, here as elsewhere, our ideas and very form of verse. One compares his lady to all kinds of precious stones and flowers; others sing truly amorous songs, at times sensual:

'Bytuene Mershe and Aueril,
When spray biginneth to springe,
The lutel foul hath hire wyl
On hyre lud to synge,
Ich libbe in loue longinge
For semlokest of alle thynge.
He may me blysse bringe,
Icham in hire baundoun.
An hendy hap ich abbe yhent,
Ichot from heuene it is me sent.
From all wymmen my love is lent,
And lyht on Alysoun.'[2]

Another sings:

'Suete lemmon, y preye the, of loue one speche,
Whil y lyue in world so wyde other nulle y seche.
With thy loue, my suete leof, mi bliss thou mihtes eche
A suete cos of thy mouth mihte be my leche.'[3]

Is not this the lively and warm imagination of the south? They speak of springtime and of love, 'the fine and lovely weather,' like *trouvères*, even like *troubadours*. The dirty, smoke-grimed cottage, the black feudal castle, where all but the master lie higgledy-piggledy on the straw in the great stone hall, the cold rain, the muddy earth, make the return of the sun and the warm air delicious.

'Sumer is i-cumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu:

[1] Time of Henry III., *Reliquiæ Antiquæ*, edited by Messrs. Wright and Halliwell, i. 102.

[2] About 1278. Warton, i. 28.

[3] *Ibid.* i. 31.

Groweth sed, and bloweth med,
And springeth the wde nu.
Sing cuccu, cuccu.
Awe bleteth after lomb,
Llouth after calue cu,
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth:
Murie sing cuccu,
Cuccu, cuccu.
Wel singes thu cuccu;
Ne swik thu nauer nu.
Sing, cuccu nu,
Sing, cuccu.[1]

Here are glowing pictures, such as Guillaume de Lorris was writing at the same time, even richer and more lively, perhaps because the poet found here for inspiration that love of country life which in England is deep and national. Others, more imitative, attempt pleasantries like those of Rutebeuf and the fabliaux, frank quips,[2] and even satirical, loose waggeries. Their true aim and end is to hit out at the monks. In every French country, or country which imitates France, the most manifest use of convents is to furnish material for sprightly and scandalous stories. One writes, for instance, of the kind of life they live at the abbey of Cocagne:

'There is a wel fair abbei,
Of white monkes and of grei.
Ther beth bowris and halles:
Al of pasteiis beth the wallis,
Of fleis, of fisse, and rich met,
The likfullist that man may et.
Fluren cakes beth the schingles alle,
Of cherche, cloister, boure, and halle.
The pinnes beth fat podinges
Rich met to princes and kinges. . . .
Though paradis be miri and bright
Cokaign is of fairir sight. . . .
Another abbei is ther bi,
Forsoth a gret fair nunnerie. . . .
When the someris dai is hote
The young nunnes takith a bote . . .
And doth ham forth in that river
Both with ores and with stere. . . .
And each monk him takes on,
And snelliche berrith forth har prei
To the mochil grei abbei,
And techith the nunnes an oreisun,
With iamblene up and down.'

[1] Warton, i. 30.

[2] *Poem of the Owl and Nightingale*, who dispute as to which has the finest voice.

This is the triumph of gluttony and feeding. Moreover many things could be mentioned in the middle ages, which are now unmentionable.

But it was the poems of chivalry, which represented to him in fair language his own mode of life, that the baron preferred to have translated. He desired that his *trouvère* should set before his eyes the magnificence which he has spread around him, and the luxury and enjoyments which he has introduced from France. Life at that time, without and even during war, was a great pageant, a brilliant and tumultuous kind of fête. When Henry II. travelled, he took with him a great number of knights, foot-soldiers, baggage-waggons, tents, war-horses, comedians, courtesans, and their overseers, cooks, confectioners, posture-makers, dancers, barbers, go-betweens, hangers-on.[1] In the morning when they start, the assemblage begins to shout, sing, hustle each other, make racket and rout, 'as if hell were let loose.' William Longchamps, even in time of peace, would not travel without a thousand horses by way of escort. When Archbishop à Becket came to France, he entered the town with two hundred knights, a number of barons and nobles, and an army of servants, all richly armed and equipped, he himself being provided with four-and-twenty suits; two hundred and fifty children walked in front, singing national songs; then dogs, then carriages, then a dozen war-horses, each ridden by an ape and a man; then equerries, with shields and horses; then more equerries, falconers, a suite of domestics, knights, priests; lastly, the archbishop himself, with his particular friends. Imagine these processions, and also these entertainments; for the Normans, after the Conquest, 'borrowed from the Saxons the habit of excess in eating and drinking.'[2] At the marriage of Richard Plantagenet, Earl of Cornwall, they provided thirty thousand dishes.[3] Add to this, that they still continued to be gallant, and punctiliously performed the great precept of the love courts; be assured that in the middle age the sense of love was no more idle than the others. Mark also that tourneys were plentiful; a sort of opera prepared for their own entertainment. So ran their life, full of adventure and adornment, in the open air and in the sunlight, with show of cavalcades and arms; they act a pageant, and act it with enjoyment. Thus the King of Scots, having come to London with a hundred knights, at the coronation of Edward I., they all dismounted, and made over their horses and superb caparisons to the people; as did also five English lords, emulating their example. In

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[1] Letter of Peter of Blois. [2] William of Malmesbury.

[3] At the installation-feast of George Nevill, Archbishop of York, the brother of Guy of Warwick, there were consumed, 104 oxen and 6 wild bulls, 1000 sheep, 304 calves, as many hogs, 2000 swine, 500 stags, bucks, and does, 204 kids, 22,802 wild or tame fowl, 300 quarters of corn, 300 tuns of ale, 100 of wine, a pipe of hypocras, 12 porpoises and seals.

the midst of war they took their pleasure. Edward III., in one of his expeditions against the King of France, took with him thirty falconers, and made his campaign alternately hunting and fighting.[1] Another time, says Froissart, the knights who joined the army carried a plaster over one eye, having vowed not to remove it until they had performed an exploit worthy of their mistresses. Out of the very exuberancy of genius they practised the art of poetry; out of the buoyancy of their imagination they made a sport of life. Edward III. built at Windsor a round hall and a round table; and in one of his tourneys in London, sixty ladies, seated on palfreys, led, as in a fairy tale, each her knight by a golden chain. Was not this the triumph of the gallant and frivolous French fashions? His wife Philippa sat as a model to the artists for their Madonnas. She appeared on the field of battle; listened to Froissart, who provided her with moral-plays, love-stories, and 'things fair to listen to.' At once goddess, heroine, and scholar, and all this so agreeably, was she not a true queen of polite chivalry? Now, as in France under Louis of Orleans and the Dukes of Burgundy, the most elegant flower of this romanesque civilisation appeared, void of common sense, given up to passion, bent on pleasure, immoral and brilliant, but, like its neighbours of Italy and Provence, for lack of serious intention, it could not last.

Of all these marvels the narrators make display in their accounts. Follow this picture of the vessel which takes the mother of King Richard into England:—

'Swlk on ne seygh they never non;
All it was whyt of huel-bon,
And every nayl with gold begrave:
Off pure gold was the stave.
Her mast was of yvory;
Off samyte the sayl wytterly.
Her ropes wer off tuely sylk,
Al so whyt as ony mylk.
That noble schyp was al withoute,
With clothys of golde sprede aboute;
And her loof and her wyndas,
Off assure forsothe it was.'[2]

On such subjects they never run dry. When the King of Hungary wishes to console his afflicted daughter, he proposes to take her to the chase in the following style:—

'To-morrow ye shall in hunting fare;
And yede, my daughter, in a chair;

[1] These prodigalities and refinements grew to excess under his grandson Richard II.

[2] Warton, i. 156.

It shall be covered with velvet red,
And cloths of fine gold all about your head,
With damask white and azure blue,
Well diapered with lilies new.
Your pommels shall be ended with gold,
Your chains enamelled many a fold,
Your mantle of rich degree,
Purple pall and ermine free.
Jennets of Spain that ben so light,
Trapped to the ground with velvet bright.
Ye shall have harp, sautry, and song,
And other mirths you among.
Ye shall have Rumney and Malespine,
Both hippocras and Vernage wine;
Montrese and wine of Greek,
Both Algrade and despice eke,
Antioch and Bastarde,
Pyment also and garnarde;
Wine of Greek and Muscadel,
Both clare, pyment, and Rochelle,
The reed your stomach to defy,
And pots of osey set you by.
You shall have venison ybake,
The best wild fowl that may be take;
A leish of harehound with you to streek,
And hart, and hind, and other like.
Ye shall be set at such a tryst,
That hart and hynd shall come to you fist,
Your disease to drive you fro,
To hear the bugles there yblow.
Homeward thus shall ye ride,
On hawking by the river's side,
With gosshawk and with gentle falcon,
With bugle-horn and merlion.
When you come home your menie among,
Ye shall have revel, dance, and song;
Little children, great and small,
Shall sing as does the nightingale.
Then shall ye go to your evensong,
With tenors and trebles among.
Threescore of copes of damask bright,
Full of pearls they shall be pight.
Your censors shall be of gold,
Indent with azure many a fold;
Your quire nor organ song shall want,
With contre-note and descant.
The other half on organs playing,
With young children full fain singing.
Then shall ye go to your supper,
And sit in tents in green arber,
With cloth of arras pight to the ground,
With sapphires set of diamond.

A hundred knights, truly told,
Shall play with bowls in alleys cold,
Your disease to drive away;
To see the fishes in pools play,
To a drawbridge then shall ye,
Th' one half of stone, th' other of tree;
A barge shall meet you full right,
With twenty-four oars full bright,
With trumpets and with clarion,
The fresh water to row up and down. . . .
Forty torches burning bright
At your bridge to bring you light,
Into your chamber they shall you bring,
With much mirth and more liking.
Your blankets shall be of fustian,
Your sheets shall be of cloth of Rennes.
Your head sheet shall be of pery pight,
With diamonds set and rubies bright.
When you are laid in bed so soft,
A cage of gold shall hang aloft,
With long paper fair burning,
And cloves that be sweet smelling.
Frankincense and olibanum,
That when ye sleep the taste may come;
And if ye no rest can take,
All night minstrels for you shall wake.'[1]

Amid such fancies and splendours the poets delight and lose themselves; and the result, like the embroideries of their canvas, bears the mark of this love of decoration. They weave it out of adventures, of extraordinary and surprising events. Now it is the life of King Horn, who, thrown into a vessel when quite young, is driven upon the coast of England, and, becoming a knight, reconquers the kingdom of his father. Now it is the history of Sir Guy, who rescues enchanted knights, cuts down the giant Colbrand, challenges and kills the Sultan in his tent. It is not for me to recount these poems, which are not English, but only translations; still, here as in France, they are multiplied, they fill the imaginations of the young society, and they grow by exaggeration, until, falling to the lowest depth of insipidity and improbability, they are buried for ever by Cervantes. What would you say of a society which had no literature but the opera with its unrealities? Yet it was a literature of this kind which nourished the genius of the middle ages. They did not ask for truth, but entertainment, and that vehement and hollow, full of glare and startling events. They asked for impossible voyages, extravagant challenges, a racket of contests, a confusion of magnificence and entanglement of chances. For introspective history they had no liking, cared nothing for the adventures of the heart, devoted their attention to the outside. They lived like

[1] Warton, i. 176, spelling modernised.

children, with eyes glued to a series of exaggerated and coloured images, and, for lack of thinking, did not perceive that they had learnt nothing.

What was there beneath this fanciful dream? Brutal and evil human passions, unchained at first by religious fury, then delivered to their own devices, and, beneath a show of external courtesy, as vile as before. Look at the popular king, Richard Cœur de Lion, and reckon up his butcheries and murders: 'King Richard,' says a poem, 'is the best king ever mentioned in song.'[1] I have no objection; but if he has the heart of a lion, he has also that brute's appetite. One day, under the walls of Acre, being convalescent, he had a great desire for some pork. There was no pork. They killed a young Saracen, fresh and tender, cooked and salted him, and the king eat him and found him very good; whereupon he desired to see the head of the pig. The cook brought it in trembling. The king falls a laughing, and says the army has nothing to fear from famine, having provisions ready at hand. He takes the town, and presently Saladin's ambassadors come to sue for pardon for the prisoners. Richard has thirty of the most noble beheaded, and bids his cook boil the heads, and serve one to each ambassador, with a ticket bearing the name and family of the dead man. Meanwhile, in their presence, he eats his own with a relish, bids them tell Saladin how the Christians make war, and ask him if it is true that they feared him. Then he orders the sixty thousand prisoners to be led into the plain:

> 'They were led into the place full even.
> There they heard angels of heaven;
> They said: "Seigneures, tuez, tuez!"
> Spares hem nought, and beheadeth these!"
> King Richard heard the angels' voice,
> And thanked God and the holy cross.'

Thereon they behead them all. When he took a town, it was his wont to murder every one, even children and women. That was the devotion of the middle ages, not only in romances, as here, but in history. At the taking of Jerusalem the whole population, seventy thousand persons, were massacred.

Thus even in chivalrous accounts break out the fierce and unbridled instincts of the bloodthirsty brute. The authentic narratives show it equally. Henry II., irritated against a page, attempted to tear out his eyes.[2] John Lackland let twenty-three hostages die in prison of hunger. Edward II. caused at one time twenty-eight nobles to be hanged and disembowelled, and was himself put to death by the inser-

[1] Warton, i. 123:

> 'In Fraunce these rhymes were wroht,
> Every Englyshe ne knew it not.'

[2] See Lingard's *History*, ii. 55, note 4.—TR.

tion of a red-hot iron into his bowels. Look in Froissart for the debaucheries and murders, in France as well as in England, of the Hundred Years' War, and then for the slaughters of the Wars of the Roses. In both countries feudal independence ended in civil war, and the middle age founders under its vices. Chivalrous courtesy, which cloaked the native ferocity, disappears like a garment suddenly consumed by the breaking out of a fire; at that time in England they killed nobles in preference, and prisoners too, even children, with insults, in cold blood. What, then, did man learn in this civilisation and by this literature? How was he humanised? What precepts of justice, habits of reflection, store of true judgments, did this culture interpose between his desires and his actions, in order to moderate his passion? He dreamed, he imagined a sort of elegant ceremonial in order to address better lords and ladies; he discovered the gallant code of little Jehan de Saintré. But where is the true education? Wherein has Froissart profited by all his vast experience? He was a fine specimen of a babbling child; what they called his poesy, the *poésie neuve*, is only a refined gabble, a senile puerility. Some rhetoricians, like Christine de Pisan, try to round their periods after an ancient model; but their literature amounts to nothing. No one can think. Sir John Maundeville, who travelled all over the world a hundred and fifty years after Villehardouin, is as contracted in his ideas as Villehardouin himself. Extraordinary legends and fables, every sort of credulity and ignorance, abound in his book. When he wishes to explain why Palestine has passed into the hands of various possessors instead of continuing under one government, he says that it is because God would not that it should continue longer in the hands of traitors and sinners, whether Christians or others. He has seen at Jerusalem, on the steps of the temple, the footmarks of the ass which our Lord rode on Palm Sunday. He describes the Ethiopians as a people who have only one foot, but so large that they can make use of it as a parasol. He instances one island 'where be people as big as gyants, of 28 feet long, and have no cloathing but beasts' skins;' then another island, 'where there are many evil and foul women, but have precious stones in their eyes, and have such force that if they behold any man with wrath, they slay him with beholding, as the basilisk doth.' The good man relates; that is all: hesitation and good sense scarcely exist in the world he lives in. He has neither judgment nor personal reflection; he piles facts one on top of another, with no further connection; his book is simply a mirror which reproduces recollections of his eyes and ears. 'And all those who will say a Pater and an Ave Maria in my behalf, I give them an interest and a share in all the holy pilgrimages I ever made in my life.' That is his farewell, and accords with all the rest. Neither public morality nor public knowledge has gained anything from these three centuries of culture. This French culture, copied in vain throughout Europe, has but superficially adorned mankind, and the varnish with

which it decked them, already fades away or scales off. It was worse in England, where the thing was more superficial and the application worse than in France, where strange hands daubed it on, and where it only half-covered the Saxon crust, which remained coarse and rough. That is the reason why, during three centuries, throughout the first feudal age, the literature of the Normans in England, made up of imitations, translations, and clumsy copies, ends in nothing.

VI.

Meantime, what has become of the conquered people? Has the old stock on which the brilliant continental flowers were grafted, engendered no shoot of its own speciality? Did it continue barren during this time under the Norman axe, which stripped it of all its shoots? It grew very feebly, but it grew nevertheless. The subjugated race is not a dismembered nation, dislocated, uprooted, sluggish, like the populations of the Continent, which, after the long Roman oppression, were delivered over to the disorderly invasion of barbarians; it remained united, fixed in its own soil, full of sap: its members were not displaced; it was simply lopped in order to receive on its crown a cluster of foreign branches. True, it had suffered, but at last the wound closed, the saps mingled.[1] Even the hard, stiff ligatures with which the Conqueror bound it, henceforth contributed to its fixity and vigour. The land was mapped out; every title verified, defined in writing;[2] every right or tenure valued; every man registered as to his locality, condition, duty, resources, worth, so that the whole nation was enveloped in a network of which not a mesh would break. Its future development was according to this pattern. Its constitution was settled, and in this determinate and stringent enclosure men were bound to unfold themselves and to act. Solidarity and strife: these were the two effects of the great and orderly establishment which shaped and held together, on one side the aristocracy of the conquerors, on the other the conquered people; even as in Rome the systematic importation of conquered peoples into the plebs, and the constrained organisation of the patricians in contrast with the plebs, enrolled the several elements in two orders, whose opposition and union formed the state. Thus, here as in Rome, the national character was moulded and completed by the habit of corporate action, the respect for written law, political and practical aptitude, the development of combative and patient energy. It was the Domesday Book which, binding this young

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[1] *Pictorial History*, i. 666; Dialogue on the Exchequer, temp. Henr. II.

[2] Domesday Book. Froude's *Hist. of England*, 1858, i. 13: 'Through all these arrangements a single aim is visible, that every man in England should have his definite place and definite duty assigned to him, and that no human being should be at liberty to lead at his own pleasure an unaccountable existence. The discipline of an army was transferred to the details of social life.'

society in a rigid discipline, made of the Saxon the Englishman we see in our own day.

Gradually and slowly, through the gloomy complainings of the chroniclers, we find the new man fashioned by action, like a child who cries because a steel instrument, though it improves his figure, gives him pain. However reduced and downtrodden the Saxons were, they did not all sink into the populace. Some,[1] almost in every county, remained lords of their estates, if they would do homage for them to the king. A great number became vassals of Norman barons, and remained proprietors on this condition. A greater number became socagers, that is, free proprietors, burdened with a tax, but possessed of the right of alienating their property; and the Saxon villeins found patrons in these, as the plebs formerly did in the Italian nobles who were transplanted to Rome. It was an effectual patronage, that of the Saxons who preserved their integral position, for they were not isolated: marriages from the first united the two races, as it had the patricians and plebeians of Rome;[2] a Norman, brother-in-law to a Saxon, defended himself in defending him. In those troublesome times, and in an armed community, relatives and allies were obliged to stand close to one another for security. After all, it was necessary for the new-comers to consider their subjects, for these subjects had the heart and courage of a man: the Saxons, like the plebeians at Rome, remembered their native rank and their original independence. We can recognise it in the complaints and indignation of the chroniclers, in the growling and menaces of popular revolt, in the long bitterness with which they continually recalled their ancient liberty, in the favour with which they cherished the daring and rebellion of the outlaws. There were Saxon families at the end of the twelfth century, who had bound themselves by a perpetual vow, to wear long beards from father to son, in memory of the national custom and of the old country. Such men, even though fallen to the condition of socagers, even sunk into villeins, had a stiffer neck than the wretched colonists of the Continent, trodden down and moulded by four centuries of Roman taxation. By their feelings as by their condition, they were the broken remains, but also the living elements, of a free people. They did not suffer the limits of oppression. They constitute the body of the nation, the laborious, courageous body which supplied its energy. The great barons felt that they must rely

[1] Domesday Book, 'tenants-in-chief.'

[2] *Pict. Hist.* i. 666. According to Ailred (temp. Hen. II.), 'a king, many bishops and abbots, many great earls and noble knights, descended both from English and Norman blood, constituted a support to the one and an honour to the other.' 'At present,' says another author of the same period, 'as the English and Normans dwell together, and have constantly intermarried, the two nations are so completely mingled together, that, at least as regards freemen, one can scarcely distinguish who is Norman, and who English. . . . The villeins attached to the soil,' he says again, 'are alone of pure Saxon blood.'

upon them in their resistance to the king. Very soon, in stipulating for themselves, they stipulated for all freemen,[1] even for the merchants and villeins. Thereafter

'No merchant shall be dispossessed of his merchandise, no villein of the instruments of his labour; no freeman, merchant, or villein shall be taxed unreasonably for a small crime; no freeman shall be arrested, or imprisoned, or disseised of his land, or outlawed, or destroyed in any manner, but by the lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land.'

The red-bearded Saxon, with his clear complexion and great white teeth, came and sate by the Norman's side; these were franklins like the one whom Chaucer describes:

'A Frankelein was in this compagnie;
White was his berd, as is the dayesie.
Of his complexion he was sanguin,
Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in win.
To liven in delit was ever his wone,
For he was Epicures owen sone,
That held opinion that plein delit
Was verraily felicite parfite.
An housholder, and that a grete was he,
Seint Julian he was in his contree.
His brede, his ale, was alway after on;
A better envyned man was no wher non.
Withouten bake mete never was his hous,
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,
It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke,
Of all deintees that men coud of thinke;
After the sondry sesons of the yere,
So changed he his mete and his soupere.
Ful many a fat partrich had he in mewe,
And many a breme, and many a luce in stewe.
Wo was his coke but if his sauce were
Poinant and sharpe, and redy all his gere.
His table, dormant in his halle alway
Stode redy covered alle the longe day.
At sessions ther was he lord and sire.
Ful often time he was knight of the shire.
An anelace and a gipciere all of silk,
Heng at his girdel, white as morwe milk.
A shereve hadde he ben, and a contour.
Was no wher swiche a worthy vavasour.'[2]

With him occasionally in the assembly, oftenest among the audience, were the yeomen, farmers, foresters, tradesmen, his fellow-countrymen, muscular and resolute men, not slow in the defence of their property, and in the support, with voice, blows, and weapons, of him who would

[1] Magna Charta, 1215.

[2] *Chaucer's Works*, ed. Sir H. Nicholas, 6 vols., 1845, *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 11, *v.* 333.

take their cause in hand. Is it likely that the discontent of such men could be overlooked?

'The Miller was a stout carl for the nones,
Ful bigge he was of braun, and eke of bones;
That proved wel, for over all ther he came,
At wrastling he wold bere away the ram.
He was short shuldered brode, a thikke gnarre,
Ther n'as no dore, that he n'olde heve of barre,
Or breke it at a renning with his hede.
His berd as any sowe or fox was rede,
And therto brode, as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A wert, and theron stode a tufte of heres,
Rede as the bristles of a sowes eres:
His nose-thirles blacke were and wide.
A swerd and bokeler bare he by his side.
His mouth as wide was as a forneis,
He was a jangler and a goliardeis,
And that was most of sinne, and harlotries.
Wel coude he stelen corne and tollen thries.
And yet he had a thomb of gold parde.
A white cote and a blew hode wered he.
A baggepipe wel coude he blowe and soune,
And therwithall he brought us out of toune.'[1]

Those are the athletic forms, the square build, the jolly John Bulls of the period, such as we yet find them, nourished by meat and porter, sustained by bodily exercise and boxing. These are the men we must keep before us, if we will understand how political liberty has been established in the country. Gradually they find the simple knights, their colleagues in the county court, too poor to assist with the great barons at the royal assemblies, coalescing with them. They become united by community of interests, by similarity of manners, by nearness of condition; they take them for their representatives, they elect them.[2] They have now entered upon public life, and the advent of a new reinforcement, gives them a perpetual standing in their changed condition. The towns laid waste by the Conquest are gradually repeopled. They obtain or exact charters; the townsmen buy themselves out of the arbitrary taxes that were imposed on them; they get possession of the land on which their houses are built; they unite themselves under mayors and aldermen. Each town now, within the meshes of the great feudal net, is a power. Leicester, rebelling against the king, summons two burgesses from each town to Parliament,[3] to authorise and support him. Thenceforth the conquered race, both in country and town, has

[1] *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 17, *v.* 547.

[2] From 1214, and also in 1225 and 1254. Guizot, *Origin of the Representative System in England*, pp. 297–299.

[3] In 1264.

risen to political life. If they are taxed, it is with their consent; they pay nothing which they do not agree to. Early in the fourteenth century their united deputies compose the House of Commons; and already, at the close of the preceding century, the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in the name of the king, said to the pope, 'It is the custom of the kingdom of England, that in all affairs relating to the state of this kingdom, the advice of all who are interested in them should be taken.'

VII.

If they have acquired liberties, it is because they have conquered them; circumstances have assisted, but character has done more. The protection of the great barons and the alliance of the plain knights have strengthened them; but it was by their native roughness and energy that they maintained their independence. For, look at the contrast they offer at this moment to their neighbours. What occupies the mind of the French people? 'The fabliaux, the naughty tricks of Renard, the art of deceiving Master Ysengrin, of stealing his wife, of cheating him out of his dinner, of getting him beaten by a third party without danger to one's self; in short, the triumph of poverty and cleverness over power united to folly. The popular hero is already the artful plebeian, chaffing, light-hearted, who, later on, will ripen into Panurge and Figaro, not apt to withstand you to your face, too sharp to care for great victories and habits of strife, inclined by the nimbleness of his wit to dodge round an obstacle; if he but touch a man with the tip of his finger, that man tumbles into the trap. But here we have other customs: it is Robin Hood, a valiant outlaw, living free and bold in the green forest, waging frank and open war against sheriff and law.[1] If ever a man was popular in his country, it was he. 'It is he,' says an old historian, 'whom the common people love so dearly to celebrate in games and comedies, and whose history, sung by fiddlers, interests them more than any other.' In the sixteenth century he still had his commemoration day, observed by all the people in the small towns and in the country. Bishop Latimer, making his pastoral tour, announced one day that he would preach in a certain place. On the morrow, proceeding to the church, he found the doors closed, and waited more than an hour before they brought him the key. At last a man came and said to him, 'Syr, thys ys a busye day with us; we cannot heare you: it is Robyn Hoodes Daye. The parishe are gone abrode to gather for Robyn Hoode. . . . I was fayne there to geve place to Robyn Hoode.'[2] The bishop was obliged to divest himself of his ecclesiastical garments and proceed on his journey, leaving his place to archers dressed in green, who played on a rustic stage the parts of Robin Hood, Little John, and their band. In fact, he is the national hero. Saxon in the

[1] Aug. Thierry, iv. 56. Ritson's *Robin Hood*, 1832.

[2] Latimer's *Sermons*, ed. Arber, 6th Sermon, 1869, p. 173.

first place, and waging war against the men of law, against bishops and archbishops, whose sway was so heavy; generous, moreover, giving to a poor ruined knight clothes, horse, and money to buy back the land he had pledged to a rapacious abbot; compassionate too, and kind to the poor, enjoining his men not to injure yeomen and labourers; but before all rash, bold, proud, who would go and draw his bow under the sheriff's eyes and to his face; ready with blows, whether to receive or to return them. He slew fourteen out of fifteen foresters who came to arrest him; he slays the sheriff, the judge, the town gatekeeper; he is ready to slay plenty more; and all this joyously, jovially, like an honest fellow who eats well, has a hard skin, lives in the open air, and revels in animal life.

'In somer when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is fulle mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulys song.'

That is how many ballads begin; and the fine weather, which makes the stags and oxen rush headlong with extended horns, inspires them with the thought of exchanging blows with sword or stick. Robin dreamed that two yeomen were thrashing him, and he wants to go and find them, angrily repulsing Little John, who offers to go in advance:

'Ah John, by me thou settest noe store,
And that I farley finde:
How offt send I my men before,
And tarry myselfe behinde?

'It is no cunning a knave to ken,
An a man but heare him speake;
An it were not for bursting of my bowe,
John, I thy head wold breake.'[1] . . .

He goes alone, and meets the robust yeoman, Guy of Gisborne:

'He that had neyther beene kythe nor kin,
Might have seen a full fayre fight,
To see how together these yeomen went
With blades both browne and bright,

'To see how these yeomen together they fought
Two howres of a summer's day;
Yett neither Robin Hood nor sir Guy
Them fettled to flye away.'[2]

You see Guy the yeoman is as brave as Robin Hood; he came to seek him in the wood, and drew the bow almost as well as he. This old popular poetry is not the praise of a single bandit, but of an entire class, the yeomanry. 'God haffe mersey on Robin Hodys solle, and saffe all god yemanry.' That is how many ballads end. The strong

[1] Ritson, *Robin Hood Ballads*, i. iv. *v.* 41–48. [2] *Ibid. v.* 145–152.

yeoman, inured to blows, a good archer, clever at sword and stick, is the favourite. There was also redoubtable, armed townsfolk, accustomed to make use of their arms. Here they are at work:

'"O that were a shame," said jolly Robin,
"We being three, and thou but one."
The pinder[1] leapt back then thirty good foot,
'Twas thirty good foot and one.

'He leaned his back fast unto a thorn,
And his foot against a stone,
And there he fought a long summer's day,
A summer's day so long,

'Till that their swords on their broad bucklers
Were broke fast into their hands.'[2] . . .

Often even Robin does not get the advantage:

'"I pass not for length," bold Arthur reply'd,
"My staff is of oke so free;
Eight foot and a half, it will knock down a calf,
And I hope it will knock down thee."

'Then Robin could no longer forbear,
He gave him such a knock,
Quickly and soon the blood came down
Before it was ten a clock.

'Then Arthur he soon recovered himself,
And gave him such a knock on the crown,
That from every side of bold Robin Hood's head
The blood came trickling down.

'Then Robin raged like a wild boar,
As soon as he saw his own blood:
Then Bland was in hast, he laid on so fast,
As though he had been cleaving of wood.

'And about and about and about they went,
Like two wild bores in a chase,
Striving to aim each other to maim,
Leg, arm, or any other place.

'And knock for knock they lustily dealt,
Which held for two hours and more,
Till all the wood rang at every bang,
They ply'd their work so sore.

'"Hold thy hand, hold thy hand," said Robin Hood,
"And let thy quarrel fall;
For here we may thrash our bones all to mesh,
And get no coyn at all.

[1] A pinder's task was to pin the sheep in the fold, cattle in the penfold or pound (Richardson).—TR.

[2] Ritson, ii. 3, *v.* 17–26.

'"And in the forrest of merry Sherwood,
Hereafter thou shalt be free."
"God a mercy for nought, my freedom I bought,
I may thank my staff, and not thee."'[1] . . .

'Who are you, then?' says Robin:

'"I am a tanner," bold Arthur reply'd,
"In Nottingham long I have wrought;
And if thou'lt come there, I vow and swear,
I will tan thy hide for nought."

'"God a mercy, good fellow," said jolly Robin,
"Since thou art so kind and free;
And if thou wilt tan my hide for nought,
I will do as much for thee."'[2]

With these generous offers, they embrace; a free exchange of honest blows always prepares the way for friendship. It was so Robin Hood tried Little John, whom he loved all his life after. Little John was seven feet high, and being on a bridge, would not give way. Honest Robin would not use his bow against him, but went and cut a stick seven feet long; and they agreed amicably to fight on the bridge until one should fall into the water. They hit and smite to such a tune that 'their bones did sound.' In the end Robin falls, and he feels nothing but respect for Little John. Another time, having a sword with him, he was thrashed by a tinker who had only a stick. Full of admiration, he gives him a hundred pounds. One time it was by a potter, who refused him toll; another by a shepherd. They fight for pastime. Even now-a-days boxers give each other a friendly grip before meeting; they knock one another about in this country honourably, without malice, fury, or shame. Broken teeth, black eyes, smashed ribs, do not call for murderous vengeance; it would seem that the bones are more solid and the nerves less sensitive in England than elsewhere. Blows once exchanged, they take each other by the hand, and dance together on the green grass:

'Then Robin took them both by the hands,
And danc'd round about the oke tree.
"For three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men we be."'

Observe, moreover, that these people, in each parish, practised the bow every Sunday, and were the best archers in the world,—that from the close of the fourteenth century the general emancipation of the villeins multiplied their number enormously, and you may understand how, amidst all the operations and changes of the great central powers, the liberty of the subject endured. After all, the only permanent and unalterable guarantee, in every country and under every constitution,

[1] Ritson, ii. 6, *v.* 58–89.

[2] *Ibid. v.* 94–101.

is this unspoken declaration in the heart of the mass of the people, which is well understood on all sides: 'If any one touches my property, enters my house, obstructs or molests me, let him beware. I have patience, but I have also strong arms, good comrades, a good blade, and, on occasion, a firm resolve, happen what may, to plunge my blade up to its hilt in his throat.'

VIII.

Thus thought Sir John Fortescue, Chancellor of England under Henry VI., exiled in France during the Wars of the Roses, one of the oldest prose-writers, and the first who weighed and explained the constitution of his country.[1] He says:

'It is cowardise and lack of hartes and corage that kepeth the Frenchmen from rysyng, and not povertye;[2] which corage no Frenche man hath like to the English man. It hath ben often seen in Englond that iij or iv thefes, for povertie, hath sett upon vij or viij true men, and robbyd them al. But it hath not ben seen in Fraunce, that vij or viij thefes have ben hardy to robbe iij or iv true men. Wherfor it is right seld that Frenchmen be hangyd for robberye, for that they have no hertys to do so terryble an acte. There be therfor mo men hangyd in Englond, in a yere, for robberye and manslaughter, than ther be hangid in Fraunce for such cause of crime in vij yers.'[3]

This throws a sudden and terrible light on the violent condition of this armed community, where blows are an everyday matter, and where every one, rich and poor, lives with his hand on his sword. There were great bands of malefactors under Edward I., who infested the country, and fought with those who came to seize them. The inhabitants of the towns were obliged to gather together with those of the neighbouring towns, with hue and cry, to pursue and capture them. Under Edward III. there were barons who rode about with armed escorts and archers, seizing the manors, carrying off ladies and girls of high degree, mutilating, killing, extorting ransoms from people in their own houses, as if they were in an enemy's land, and sometimes coming before the judges at the sessions in such guise and in so great force that the judges were afraid and dare not administer justice.[4] Read

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[1] *The Difference between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy—A learned Commendation of the Politic Laws of England* (Latin). I frequently quote from the second work, which is complete.

[2] The courage which gives utterance here is coarse; the English instincts are combative and independent. The French race, and the Gauls generally, are perhaps the most reckless of life of any.

[3] *The Difference*, etc., 3d ed. 1724, ch. xiii. p. 98. There are now-a-days in France 42 highway robberies as against 738 in England. In 1843, there were in England four times as many accusations of crimes and offences as in France, having regard to the number of inhabitants (*Moreau de Jonnès*).

[4] Statute of Winchester, 1285; Ordinance of 1378.

the letters of the Paston family, under Henry VI. and Edward IV., and you will see how private war was at every door, how it was necessary to defend oneself with men and arms, to be alert for the defence of one's property, to be self-reliant, to depend on one's own strength and courage. It is this excess of vigour and readiness to fight which, after their victories in France, set them against one another in England, in the butcheries of the Wars of the Roses. The strangers who saw them were astonished at their bodily strength and courage of heart, at the great pieces of beef 'which feed their muscles, at their military habits, their fierce obstinacy, as of savage beasts.'[1] They are like their bulldogs, an untameable race, who in their mad courage 'cast themselves with shut eyes into the den of a Russian bear, and get their head broken like a rotten apple.' This strange condition of a military community, so full of danger, and requiring so much effort, does not make them afraid. King Edward having given orders to send disturbers of the peace to prison without legal proceedings, and not to liberate them, on bail or otherwise, the Commons declared the order 'horribly vexatious;' resist it, refuse to be too much protected. Less peace, but more independence. They maintain the guarantees of the subject at the expense of public security, and prefer turbulent liberty to arbitrary order. Better suffer marauders whom one can fight, than provosts under whom they would have to bend.

This proud and persistent notion gives rise to, and fashions, Fortescue's whole work:

'Ther be two kynds of kyngdomys, of the which that one ys a lordship callid in Latyne Dominium regale, and that other is callid Dominium politicum et regale.'

The first is established in France, and the second in England.

'And they dyversen in that the first may rule his people by such lawys as he makyth hymself, and therefor, he may set upon them talys, and other impositions, such as he wyl hymself, without their assent. The secund may not rule hys people by other laws than such as they assenten unto; and therfor he may set upon them non impositions without their own assent.'[2]

In a state like this, the will of the people is the prime element of life. Sir John Fortescue says further:

'A king of England cannot at his pleasure make any alterations in the laws of the land, for the nature of his government is not only regal, but political.'

'In the body politic, the first thing which lives and moves is the intention of the people, having in it the blood, that is, the prudential care and provision for the public good, which it transmits and communicates to the head, as to the principal part, and to all the rest of the members of the said body politic, whereby it subsists and is invigorated. The law under which the people is incorporated may be compared to the nerves or sinews of the body natural. . . . And as the

[1] Benvenuto Cellini, quoted by Froude, i. 20, *Hist. of England.* Shakspeare, *Henry V.*; conversation of French lords before the battle of Agincourt.

[2] *The Difference*, etc., p. i.

bones and all the other members of the body preserve their functions and discharge their several offices by the nerves, so do the members of the community by the law. And as the head of the body natural cannot change its nerves or sinews, cannot deny to the several parts their proper energy, their due proportion and aliment of blood, neither can a king who is the head of the body politic change the laws thereof, nor take from the people what is theirs by right, against their consents. . . . For he is appointed to protect his subjects in their lives, properties, and laws; for this very end and purpose he has the delegation of power from the people.'

Here we have all the ideas of Locke in the fifteenth century; so powerful is practice to suggest theory! so quickly does man discover, in the enjoyment of liberty, the nature of liberty! Fortescue goes further: he contrasts, step by step, the Roman law, that heritage of all Latin peoples, with the English law, that heritage of all Teutonic peoples: one the work of absolute princes, and tending altogether to the sacrifice of the individual; the other the work of the common will, tending altogether to protect the person. He contrasts the maxims of the imperial jurisconsults, who accord 'force of law to all which is determined by the prince,' with the statutes of England, which 'are not enacted by the sole will of the prince, . . . but with the concurrent consent of the whole kingdom, by their representatives in Parliament, . . . more than three hundred select persons.' He contrasts the arbitrary nomination of imperial officers with the election of the sheriff, and says:

'There is in every county a certain officer, called the king's sheriff, who, amongst other duties of his office, executes within his county all mandates and judgments of the king's courts of justice: he is an annual officer; and it is not lawful for him, after the expiration of his year, to continue to act in his said office, neither shall he be taken in again to execute the said office within two years thence next ensuing. The manner of his election is thus: Every year, on the morrow of All-Souls, there meet in the King's Court of Exchequer all the king's counsellors, as well lords spiritual and temporal, as all other the king's justices, all the barons of the Exchequer, the Master of the Rolls, and certain other officers, when all of them, by common consent, nominate three of every county knights or esquires, persons of distinction, and such as they esteem fittest qualified to bear the office of sheriff of that county for the year ensuing. The king only makes choice of one out of the three so nominated and returned, who, in virtue of the king's letters patent, is constituted High Sheriff of that county.'

He contrasts the Roman procedure, which is satisfied with two witnesses to condemn a man with the jury, the three permitted challenges, the admirable guarantees of justice with which the uprightness, number, repute, and condition of the juries surround the sentence. About the juries he says:

'Twelve good and true men being sworn, as in the manner above related, legally qualified, that is, having, over and besides their moveables, possessions in land sufficient, as was said, wherewith to maintain their rank and station; neither inspected by, nor at variance with either of the parties; all of the neighbourhood;

there shall be read to them, in English, by the Court, the record and nature of the plea.'[1]

Thus protected, the English commons cannot be other than flourishing. Consider, on the other hand, he says to the young prince whom he is instructing, the condition of the commons in France. By their taxes, tax on salt, on wine, billeting of soldiers, they are reduced to great misery. You have seen them on your travels. . . .

'The same Commons be so impoverishid and distroyyd, that they may unneth lyve. Thay drink water, thay eate apples, with bred right brown made of rye. They eate no fleshe, but if it be selden, a litill larde, or of the entrails or heds of bests sclayne for the nobles and merchants of the land. They weryn no wollyn, but if it be a pore cote under their uttermost garment, made of grete canvass, and cal it a frok. Their hosyn be of like canvas, and passen not their knee, wherfor they be gartrid and their thyghs bare. Their wifs and children gone bare fote. . . . For sum of them, that was wonte to pay to his lord for his tenement which he hyrith by the year a scute payth now to the kyng, over that scute, fyve skuts. Wher thrugh they be artyd by necessite so to watch, labour and grub in the ground for their sustenance, that their nature is much wasted, and the kynd of them brought to nowght. Thay gone crokyd and ar feeble, not able to fight nor to defend the realm; nor they have wepon, nor monye to buy them wepon withal. . . . This is the frute first of hyre Jus regale. . . . But blessed be God, this land ys rulid under a better lawe, and therfor the people therof be not in such penurye; nor therby hurt in their persons, but they be wealthie and have all things necessarie to the sustenance of nature. Wherefore they be myghty and able to resyste the adversaries of the realms that do or will do them wrong. Loo, this is the frut of Jus politicum et regale, under which we lyve.'[2] 'Everye inhabiter of the realme of England useth and enjoyeth at his pleasure all the fruites that his land or cattel beareth, with al the profits and commodities which by his owne travayle, or by the labour of others, hae gaineth; not hindered by the iniurie or wrong deteinement of anye man, but that hee shall bee allowed a reasonable recompence.[3] . . . Hereby it commeth to passe that the men of that lande are riche, havyng aboundaunce of golde and silver, and other thinges necessarie for the maintenaunce of man's life. They drinke no water, unlesse it be so, that some for devotion, and uppon a zeale of penaunce, doe abstaine from other drinks. They eate plentifully of all kindes of fleshe and fishe. They weare fine woollen cloth in all their apparel; they have also aboundaunce of bed-coveringes in their houses, and of all other woollen stuffe. They have greate store of all hustlementes and implementes of householde, they are plentifully furnished with al instruments of husbandry, and all other things that are requisite to the accomplishment of a quiet and wealthy lyfe, according to their estates and degrees. Neither are they sued in the lawe, but onely before ordinary iudges, where by the lawes of the lande they are iustly intreated. Neither are they

[1] The original of this very famous treatise, *de Laudibus Legum Angliæ*, was written in Latin between 1464 and 1470, first published in 1537, and translated into English in 1737 by Francis Gregor. I have taken these extracts from the magnificent edition of Sir John Fortescue's works published in 1869 for private distribution, and edited by Thomes Fortescue, Lord Clermont. Some of the pieces quoted, left in the old spelling, are taken from an older edition.—TR.

[2] *Of an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, 3d ed., 1724, ch. iii. p. 15.

[3] Commines bears the same testimony.

arrested or impleaded for their moveables or possessions, or arraigned of any offence, bee it never so great and outragious, but after the lawes of the land, and before the iudges aforesaid.'[1]

All this arises from the constitution of the country and the distribution of the land. Whilst in other countries we find only a population of paupers, with here and there a few lords, England is covered and filled with owners of lands and fields; so that 'therein so small a thorpe cannot bee founde, wherein dwelleth not a knight, an esquire, or suche a housholder as is there commonly called a franklayne, enryched with greate possessions. And also other freeholders, and many yeomen able for their livelodes to make a jurye in fourme afore-mentioned. For there bee in that lande divers yeomen, which are able to dispende by the yeare above a hundred poundes.'[2] Harrison says:[3]

'This sort of people have more estimation than labourers and the common sort of artificers, and these commonlie live wealthilie, keepe good houses, and travell to get riches. They are for the most part farmers to gentlemen,' and keep servants of their own. 'These were they that in times past made all France afraid. And albeit they be not called master, as gentlemen are, or sir, as to knights apperteineth, but onelie John and Thomas, etc., yet have they beene found to have done verie good service; and the kings of England, in foughten battels, were wont to remaine among them (who were their footmen) as the French kings did among their horssemen: the prince thereby showing where his chiefe strength did consist.'

Such men, says Fortescue, might form a legal jury, and vote, resist, be associated, do everything wherein a free government consists: for they were numerous in every district; they were not down-trodden like the timid peasants of France; they had their honour and that of their family to maintain; 'they be well provided with arms; they remember that they have won battles in France.'[4] Such is the class, still obscure,

[1] *De Laudibus*, etc., ch. xxxvi.

[2] 'The might of the realme most stondyth upon archers which be not rich men.' Compare Hallam, ii. 482. All this takes us back as far as the Conquest, and farther. 'It is reasonable to suppose that the greater part of those who appear to have possessed small freeholds or parcels of manors were no other than the original nation. . . . A respectable class of free socagers, having in general full right of alienating their lands, and holding them probably at a small certain rent from the lord of the manor, frequently occurs in the Domesday Book.' At all events, there were in Domesday Book Saxons 'perfectly exempt from villenage.' This class is mentioned with respect in the treatises of Glanvil and Bracton. As for the villeins, they were quickly liberated in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, either by their own energies or by becoming copyholders. The Wars of the Roses still further raised the commons; orders were frequently issued, previous to a battle, to slay the nobles and spare the commoners.

[3] *Description of England*, 275.

[4] The following is a portrait of a yeoman, by Latimer, in the first sermon preached before Edward VI., 8th March 1549: 'My father was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own; only he had a farm of £3 or £4 by year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half a dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find

but more rich and powerful every century, who, founded on the degraded Saxon aristocracy, and sustained by the surviving Saxon character, ended, under the lead of the inferior Norman nobility, and under the patronage of the superior Norman nobility, in establishing and settling a free constitution, and a nation worthy of liberty.

IX.

When, as here, men are endowed with a serious character, strengthened by a resolute spirit, and entrenched in independent habits, they meddle with their conscience as with their daily business, and end by laying hands on church as well as state. It is now a long time since the exactions of the Roman See provoked the resistance of the people,[1] and a presuming priesthood became unpopular. Men complained that the best livings were given by the Pope to non-resident strangers; that some Italian, unknown in England, possessed fifty or sixty benefices in England; that English money poured into Rome; and that the clergy, being judged only by clergy, gave themselves up to their vices, and abused their state of impunity. In the first years of Henry III. there were reckoned nearly a hundred murders committed by priests still alive. At the beginning of the fourteenth century the ecclesiastical revenue was twelve times greater than the civil; about half the soil was in the hands of the clergy. At the end of the century the commons declared that the taxes paid to the church were five times greater than the taxes paid to the crown; and some years afterwards,[2]

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the king a harness, with himself and his horse; while he came to the place that he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when he went unto Blackheath field. He kept me to school, or else I had not been able to have preached before the King's Majesty now. He married my sisters with £5 or 20 nobles a-piece, so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God; he kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor; and all this did he of the said farm. Where he that now hath it payeth £16 by the year, or more, and is not able to do anything for his prince, for himself, nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor.'

This is from the sixth sermon, preached before the young king, 12th April 1549: 'In my time my poor father was as diligent to teach me to shoot as to learn (me) any other thing; and so, I think, other men did their children. He taught me how to draw, how to lay my body in my bow, and not to draw with strength of arms, as other nations do, but with strength of the body. I had my bows bought me according to my age and strength; as I increased in them, so my bows were made bigger and bigger; for men shall never shoot well except they be brought up in it. It is a goodly art, a wholesome kind of exercise, and much commended in physic.'

[1] *Pict. Hist.* i. 802. In 1246, 1376. Thierry, iii. 79.

[2] 1404–1409. The commons declared that with these revenues the king would be able to maintain 15 earls, 1500 knights, 6200 squires, and 100 hospitals: each earl receiving annually 300 marks; each knight 100 marks, and the produce of four ploughed lands; each squire 40 marks, and the produce of two ploughed lands. *Pict. Hist.* ii. 142.

considering that the wealth of the clergy only served to keep them in idleness and luxury, they proposed to confiscate it for the public benefit. Already the idea of the Reformation had forced itself upon them. They remembered how in the ballads Robin Hood ordered his folk to 'spare the yeomen, labourers, even knights, if they are good fellows,' but never to pardon abbots or bishops. The prelates grievously oppressed the people with their laws, tribunals, and tithes; and suddenly, amid the pleasant banter and the monotonous babble of the Norman versifiers, we hear resound the indignant voice of a Saxon, a man of the people and a victim.

It is the vision of Piers Ploughman, a carter, written, it is supposed, by a secular priest of Oxford.[1] Doubtless the traces of French taste are perceptible. It could not be otherwise: the people from below can never quite prevent themselves from imitating the people above; and the most unshackled popular poets, Burns and Béranger, too often preserve an academic style. So here a fashionable machinery, the allegory of the Roman de la Rose, is pressed into service. We have Do-well, Covetousness, Avarice, Simony, Conscience, and a whole world of talking abstractions. But in spite of these vain foreign phantoms, the body of the poem is national, and true to life. The old language reappears in part; the old metre altogether; no more rhymes, but barbarous alliterations; no more jesting, but a harsh gravity, a sustained invective, a grand and sombre imagination, heavy Latin texts, hammered down as by a Protestant hand. Piers Ploughman went to sleep on the Malvern hills, and there had a wonderful dream:

'Thanne gan I meten—a merveillous swevene,
That I was in a wildernesse—wiste I nevere where;
And as I biheeld into the eest,—an heigh to the sonne,
I seigh a tour on a toft,—trieliche y-maked,
A deep dale bynethe—a dongeon thereinne
With depe diches and derke—and dredfulle of sighte.
A fair feeld ful of folk—fond I ther bitwene,
Of alle manere of men,—the meene and the riche,
Werchynge and wandrynge—as the world asketh.
Some putten hem to the plough,—pleiden ful selde,
In settynge and sowynge—swonken ful harde,
And wonnen that wastours—with glotonye dystruyeth.'[2]

A gloomy picture of the world, like the frightful dreams which occur so often in Albert Durer and Luther. The first reformers were persuaded that the earth was given over to evil; that the devil had in it his empire and his officers; that Antichrist, seated on the throne of Rome, spread out ecclesiastical pomps to seduce souls, and cast them into the fire of hell. So here Antichrist, with raised banner, enters a convent; bells are rung; monks in solemn procession go to meet him,

[1] About 1362.

[2] *Piers Ploughman's Vision and Creed*, ed. T. Wright, 1856, i. p. 2, *v.* 21–44.

and receive with congratulations their lord and father.[1] With seven great giants, the seven deadly sins, he besieges Conscience; and the assault is led by Idleness, who brings with her an army of more than a thousand prelates: for vices reign, more hateful from being in holy places, and employed in the church of God in the devil's service:

'Ac now is Religion a rydere—a romere aboute,
A ledere of love-dayes—and a lond-buggere,
A prikere on a palfrey—fro manere to manere. . . .
And but if his knave knele—that shal his coppe brynge,
He loureth on hym, and asketh hym—who taughte hym curteisie.'[2]

But this sacrilegious show has its day, and God puts His hand on men in order to warn them. By order of Conscience, Nature sends up a host of plagues and diseases:

'Kynde Conscience tho herde,—and cam out of the planetes,
And sente forth his forreyours—feveres and fluxes,
Coughes and cardiacles,—crampes and tooth-aches,
Reumes and radegundes,—and roynous scabbes,
Biles and bocches,—and brennynge agues,
Frenesies and foule yveles,—forageres of kynde. . . .
There was "Harrow! and Help!—Here cometh Kynde!
With Deeth that is dredful—to undo us alle!"
The lord that lyved after lust—tho aloud cryde. . . .
Deeth cam dryvynge after,—and al to duste passhed
Kynges and knyghtes,—kaysers and popes, . . .
Manye a lovely lady—and lemmans of knyghtes,
Swowned and swelted for sorwe of hise dyntes.'[3]

Here is a crowd of miseries, like those which Milton has described in his vision of human life; tragic pictures and emotions, such as the reformers delight to dwell upon. There is a like speech delivered by John Knox, before the fair ladies of Mary Stuart, which tears the veil from the human corpse just as brutally, in order to exhibit its shame. The conception of the world, proper to the people of the north, all sad and moral, shows itself already. They are never comfortable in their country; they have to strive continually against cold or rain. They cannot live there carelessly, lying under a lovely sky, in a sultry and clear atmosphere, their eyes filled with the noble beauty and happy serenity of the land. They must work to live; be attentive, exact, close and repair their houses, wade boldly through the mud behind their plough, light their lamps in the shops during the day. Their climate imposes endless inconvenience, and exacts endless endurance. Hence arise melancholy and the idea of duty. Man naturally thinks of life as of a battle, oftener of black death which closes this

[1] The Archdeacon of Richmond, on his tour in 1216, came to the priory of Bridlington with ninety-seven horses, twenty-one dogs, and three falcons.

[2] *Piers Ploughman's Vision*, i. p. 191, *v.* 6217-6228.

[3] *Ibid.* ii. Last book, p. 430, *v.* 14084-14135.

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deadly show, and leads so many plumed and disorderly processions to the silence and the eternity of the grave. All this visible world is vain; there is nothing true but human virtue,—the courageous energy with which man attains to self-command, the generous energy with which he employs himself in the service of others. On this view he fixes his eyes; they pierce through worldly gauds, neglect sensual joys, to attain this. By such internal action the ideal is displaced; a new source of action springs up—the idea of righteousness. What sets them against ecclesiastical pomp and insolence, is neither the envy of the poor and low, nor the anger of the oppressed, nor a revolutionary desire to experimentalise abstract truth, but conscience. They tremble lest they should not work out their salvation if they continue in a corrupted church; they fear the menaces of God, and dare not embark on the great journey with unsafe guides. 'What is righteousness?' asked Luther anxiously, 'and how shall I obtain it?' With like anxiety Piers Ploughman goes to seek Do-well, and asks each one to show him where he shall find him. 'With us,' say the friars. 'Contra quath ich, *Septies in die cadit justus*, and ho so syngeth certys doth nat wel;' so he betakes himself to 'study and writing,' like Luther; the clerks at table speak much of God and of the Trinity, 'and taken Bernarde to witnesse, and putteth forth presompcions . . . ac the carful mai crie and quaken atte gate, bothe a fyngred and a furst, and for defaute spille ys non so hende to have hym yn. Clerkus and knyghtes carpen of God ofte, and haveth hym muche in hure mouthe, ac mene men in herte;' and heart, inner faith, living virtue, are what constitute true religion. This is what these dull Saxons had begun to discover; the Teutonic conscience, and English good sense too, had been aroused, with individual energy, the resolution to judge and to decide alone, by and for one's self. 'Christ is our hede that sitteth on hie, Heddis ne ought we have no mo,' says a poem,[1] attributed to Chaucer, and which, with others, claims independence for Christian consciences.

> 'We ben his membres bothe also,
> Father he taught us call him all,
> Maisters to call forbad he tho;
> Al maisters ben wickid and fals.'

No mediator between man and God. In vain the doctors state that they have authority for their words; there is a word of greater authority, to wit, God's. We hear it in the fourteenth century, this grand word. It quitted the learned schools, the dead languages, the dusty shelves on which the clergy suffered it to sleep, covered with a confusion of commentaries and Fathers.[2] Wiclif appeared and translated it like Luther,

[1] *Piers Plowman's Crede; the Plowman's Tale*, printed in 1550. There were three editions in one year, it was so manifestly Protestant.

[2] Knighton, about 1400, wrote thus of Wiclif: 'Transtulit de Latino in anglicam linguam, non angelicam. Unde per ipsum fit vulgare, et magis apertum

and in a spirit similar to Luther's. 'Cristen men and wymmen, olde and yonge, shulden studie fast in the Newe Testament, for it is of ful autorite, and opyn to undirstonding of simple men, as to the poyntis that be moost nedeful to salvacioun:'[1] Religion must be secular, in order to escape from the hands of the clergy, who forestall it; each must hear and read for himself the word of God: he will be sure that it has not been corrupted in the passage; he will feel it better, and more, he will understand it better; for

'ech place of holy writ, both opyn and derk, techith mekenes and charite; and therfore he that kepith mekenes and charite hath the trewe undirstondyng and perfectioun of al holi writ. . . . Therfore no simple man of wit be aferd unmesurabli to studie in the text of holy writ . . . and no clerk be proude of the verrey undirstondyng of holy writ, for whi undirstonding of hooly writ with outen charite that kepith Goddis heestis, makith a man depper dampned . . . and pride and covetise of clerkis is cause of her blindees and eresie, and priveth them fro verrey undirstondyng of holy writ.'[2]

These are the memorable words that began to circulate in the markets and in the schools. They read the translated Bible, and commented on it; they judged the existing Church after it. What judgments these serious and renovated minds passed upon it, with what readiness they pushed on to the true religion of their race, we may see from their petition to Parliament.[3] One hundred and thirty years before Luther, they said that the pope was not established by Christ, that pilgrimages and image-worship were akin to idolatry, that external forms are of no importance, that priests ought not to possess temporal wealth, that the doctrine of transubstantiation made a people idolatrous, that priests have not the power of absolving from sin. In proof of all this they brought forward texts of Scripture. Fancy these brave spirits, simple and strong souls, who began to read at night, in their shops, by candle-light; for they were shopmen—a tailor, and a furrier, and a baker—who, with some men of letters, began to read, and then to believe, and finally got themselves burned.[4] What a sight for the fifteenth century, and what a promise! It seems as though, with liberty of action, liberty of mind begins to appear; that these common folk will think and speak; that under a conventional literature, introduced from France, a new literature is dawning; and that England, genuine England, half-mute since the Conquest, will at last find a voice.

She had not found it. King and peers ally themselves to the Church, pass terrible statutes, destroy lives, burn heretics alive, often

laicis et mulieribus legere scientibus quam solet esse clericis admodum litteratis, et bene intelligentibus. Et sic evangelica margerita spargitur et a porcis conculcatur . . . (ita) ut laicis commune æternum quod ante fuerat clericis et ecclesiæ doctoribus talentum supernum.'

[1] Wiclif's Bible, ed. Forshall and Madden, 1850, preface to Oxford edition, p. 2.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] In 1395.

[4] 1401, William Sawtré, the first Lollard burned alive.

with refinement of torture,—one in a barrel, another hung by an iron chain round his waist. The temporal wealth of the clergy had been attacked, and therewith the whole English constitution; and the great establishment above crushed out with its whole weight the assailants from below. Darkly, in silence, while in the Wars of the Roses the nobles were destroying each other, the commoners went on working and living, separating themselves from the official Church, maintaining their liberties, amassing their wealth,[1] but not going beyond. Like a vast rock which underlies the soil, yet crops up here and there at distant intervals, they barely exhibit themselves. No great poetical or religious work displays them to the light. They sang; but their ballads, first ignored, then transformed, reach us only in a late edition. They prayed; but beyond one or two indifferent poems, their incomplete and repressed doctrine bore no fruit. One may well see from the verse, tone, and drift of their ballads, that they are capable of the finest poetic originality,[2] but their poetry is in the hands of yeomen and harpers. We perceive, by the precocity and energy of their religious protests, that they are capable of the most severe and impassioned creeds; but their faith remains hidden in the shop-parlours of a few obscure sectaries. Neither their faith nor their poetry has been able to attain its end or issue. The Renaissance and the Reformation, those two national outbreaks, are still far off; and the literature of the period retains to the end, like the highest ranks of English society, almost the perfect stamp of its French origin and its foreign models.

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[1] Commines, v. ch. 19 and 20: 'In my opinion, of all kingdoms of the world of which I have any knowledge, where the public weal is best observed, and least violence is exercised on the people, and where no buildings are overthrown or demolished in war, England is the best; and the ruin and misfortune falls on them who wage the war. . . . The kingdom of England has this advantage beyond other nations, that the people and the country are not destroyed or burnt, nor the buildings demolished; and ill-fortune falls on men of war, and especially on the nobles.'

[2] See the ballads of *Chevy Chase*, *The Nut-Brown Maid*, etc. Many of them are admirable little dramas.

CHAPTER III.

The New Tongue.

I. Chaucer—His education—His political and social life—Wherein his talent was serviceable—He paints the second feudal society.

II. How the middle age degenerated—Decline of the serious element in manners, books, and works of art—Need of excitement—Analogies of architecture and literature.

III. Wherein Chaucer belongs to the middle age—Romantic and ornamental poems—*Le Roman de la Rose*—*Troïlus and Cressida*—*Canterbury Tales*—Order of description and events—*The House of Fame*—Fantastic dreams and visions—Love poems—*Troïlus and Cressida*—Exaggerated development of love in the middle age—Why the mind took this path—Mystic love—*The Flower and the Leaf*—Sensual love—*Troïlus and Cressida.*

IV. Wherein Chaucer is French—Satirical and jovial poems—*Canterbury Tales*—*The Wife of Bath* and marriage—The mendicant friar and religion—Buffoonery, waggery, and coarseness in the middle age.

V. Wherein Chaucer was English and original—Idea of character and individual—Van Eyck and Chaucer contemporary—Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*—Portraits of the franklin, monk, miller, citizen, knight, squire, prioress, the good clerk—Connection of events and characters—General idea—Importance of the same—Chaucer a precursor of the Reformation—He halts by the way—Delays and Childishness—Causes of this feebleness—His prose, and scholastic notion—How he is isolated in his age.

VI. Connection of philosophy and poetry—How general notions failed under the scholastic philosophy—Why poetry failed—Comparison of civilisation and decadence in the middle age, and in Spain—Extinction of the English literature—Translators—Rhyming chronicles—Didactic poets—Compilers of moralities—Gower—Occleve—Lydgate—Analogy of taste in costumes, buildings, and literature—Sad notion of fate, and human misery—Hawes—Barclay—Skelton—Elements of the Reformation and of the Renaissance.

I.

AMID so many barren endeavours, throughout the long impotence of Norman literature, which was content to copy, and of Saxon literature, which bore no fruit, a definite language was nevertheless attained, and there was room for a great writer. Geoffrey Chaucer appeared, a man of mark, inventive though a disciple, original though a translator, who by his genius, education, and life, was enabled to know and to depict a whole world, but above all to satisfy the chivalric

world and the splendid courts which shone upon the heights.[1] He belonged to it, though learned and versed in all branches of scholastic knowledge; and he took such part in it, that his life from end to end was that of a man of the world, and a man of action. We find him alternately in King Edward's army, in the king's train, husband of a queen's maid of honour, a pensioner, a placeholder, a deputy in Parliament, a knight, founder of a family which was hereafter to become allied to royalty. Moreover, he was in the king's council, brother-in-law of the Duke of Lancaster, employed more than once in open embassies or secret missions at Florence, Genoa, Milan, Flanders, commissioner in France for the marriage of the Prince of Wales, high up and low down in the political ladder, disgraced, restored to place. This experience of business, travel, war, the court, was not like a book education. He was at the court of Edward III., the most splendid in Europe, amidst tourneys, grand entrances, displays; he took part in the pomps of France and Milan; conversed with Petrarch, perhaps with Boccacio and Froissart; was actor in, and spectator of, the finest and most tragical of dramas. In these few words, what ceremonies and processions are implied! what pageantry of armour, caparisoned horses, bedecked ladies! what display of gallant and lordly manners! what a varied and brilliant world, well suited to occupy the mind and eyes of a poet! Like Froissart, better than he, Chaucer could depict the character of the nobles, their mode of life, their amours, even other things, and please them by his portraiture.

II.

Two notions raised the middle age above the chaos of barbarism: one religious, which had fashioned the gigantic cathedrals, and swept the masses from their native soil to hurl them upon the Holy Land; the other secular, which had built feudal fortresses, and set the man of courage armed, upon his feet, within his own domain: the one had produced the adventurous hero, the other the mystical monk; the one, to wit, the belief in God, the other the belief in self. Both, running to excess, had degenerated by expenditure of force: the one had exalted independence into rebellion, the other had changed piety into enthusiasm: the first made man unfit for civil life, the second drew him back from natural life: the one, sanctioning disorder, dissolved society; the other, enthroning irrationality, perverted intelligence. Chivalry had need to be repressed before issuing in brigandage; devotion restrained before inducing slavery. Turbulent feudalism grew feeble, like oppressive theocracy; and the two great master passions, deprived of their sap and lopped of their stem, gave place by their weakness to the monotony of habit and the taste for worldliness, which shot forth in their stead and flourished under their name.

[1] Born between 1328 and 1345, died in 1400.

Insensibly, the serious element declined, in books as in manners, in works of art as in books. Architecture, instead of being the handmaid of faith, became the slave of phantasy. It was exaggerated, confined to mere decoration, sacrificing general effect to detail, shot up its steeples to unreasonable heights, festooned its churches with canopies, pinnacles, trefoiled arches, open-worked galleries. 'Its whole aim was continually to climb higher, to clothe the sacred edifice with a gaudy bedizenment, as if it were a bride on the wedding morning.'[1] Before this marvellous lacework, what emotion could one feel but a pleased astonishment? What becomes of Christian sentiment before such scenic ornamentations? In like manner literature sets itself to play. In the eighteenth century, the second age of absolute monarchy, we saw on one side garlanded top-knots and cupolas, on the other pretty *vers de société*, courtly and sprightly tales, taking the place of severe beauty-lines and noble writings. Even so in the fourteenth century, the second age of feudalism, they had on one side the stone fretwork and slender efflorescence of aerial forms, and on the other finical verses and diverting stories, taking the place of the old grand architecture and the old simple literature. It is no longer the overflowing of a true sentiment which produces them, but the craving for excitement. Consider Chaucer, his subjects, and how he selects them. He goes far and wide to discover them, to Italy, France, to the popular legends, the ancient classics. His readers need diversity, and his business is to 'provide fine tales:' it was in those days the poet's business.[2] The lords at table have finished dinner, the minstrels come and sing, the brightness of the torches falls on the velvet and ermine, on the fantastic figures, the oddities, the elaborate embroidery of their long garments; then the poet arrives, presents his manuscript, 'richly illuminated, bound in crimson violet, embellished with silver clasps and bosses, roses of gold:' they ask him for his subject, and he answers 'Love.'

III.

In fact, it is the most agreeable subject, fittest to make the evening hours flow sweetly, amid the spiced goblets and the burning perfumes. Chaucer translated first that great storehouse of gallantry, the *Roman de la Rose*. There is no pleasanter entertainment. It is about a rose which the lover wished to pluck: the pictures of the May months, the groves, the flowery earth, the green hedgerows, abound and display their bloom. Then come portraits of the smiling ladies, Richesse, Fraunchise, Gaiety, and by way of contrast, two sad characters, Daunger and Travail, all crowding, and minutely described, with detail of features, clothing, attitude; they walk about, as in a piece of

[1] Renan, *De l'Art au Moyen Age*.

[2] See Froissart, his life with the Count of Foix and with King Richard II.

tapestry, amid landscapes, dances, castles, with allegorical groups, in lively sparkling colours, displayed, contrasted, ever renewed and varied so as to entertain the sight. For an evil has arisen, unknown to serious ages—*ennui:* novelty and brilliancy followed by novelty and brilliancy are necessary to withstand it; and Chaucer, like Boccacio and Froissart, enters into the struggle with all his heart. He borrows from Boccacio his history of Palamon and Arcite, from Lollius his history of Troïlus and Cressida, and re-arranges them. How the two young Theban knights, Arcite and Palamon, both fall in love with the beautiful Emily, and how Arcite, victorious in tourney, falls and dies, bequeathing Emily to his rival; how the fine Trojan knight Troïlus wins the favours of Cressida, and how Cressida abandons him for Diomedes—these are still tales in verse, tales of love. A little long they may be; all the writings of this age, French, or imitated from French, are born of too prodigal minds; but how they glide along! A winding stream, which flows smoothly on level sand, and glitters now and again in the sun, is the only image we can find. The characters speak too much, but then they speak so well! Even when they dispute, we like to listen, their anger and offences are so wholly based on a happy overflow of unbroken converse. Remember Froissart, how slaughters, assassinations, plagues, the butcheries of the Jacquerie, the whole chaos of human misery, is forgotten in his fine uniform humour, so that the furious and raving figures seem but ornaments and choice embroiderings to relieve the train of shaded and coloured silk which forms the groundwork of his narrative!

But, in particular, a multitude of descriptions spread their gilding over all. Chaucer leads you among arms, palaces, temples, and halts before each scene. Here:

> 'The statue of Venus glorious for to see
> Was naked fleting in the large see,
> And fro the navel doun all covered was
> With wawes grene, and bright as any glas.
> A citole in hire right hand hadde she,
> And on hire hed, ful semely for to see,
> A rose gerlond fressh, and wel smelling,
> Above hire hed hire doves fleckering.'[1]

Further on, the temple of Mars:

> 'First on the wall was peinted a forest,
> In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
> With knotty knarry barrein trees old
> Of stubbes and sharp and hidous to behold;
> In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
> As though a storme shuld bresten every bough:
> And dounward from an hill under a bent,
> Ther stood the temple of Mars armipotent,

[1] *Knight's Tale,* ii. p. 59, *v.* 1957–1964.

Wrought all of burned stele, of which th' entree
Was longe and streite, and gastly for to see.
And therout came a rage and swiche a vise,
That it made all the gates for to rise.
The northern light in at the dore shone,
For window on the wall ne was ther none,
Thurgh which men mighten any light discerne.
The dore was all of athamant eterne,
Yclenched overthwart and endelong
With yren tough, and for to make it strong,
Every piler the temple to sustene
Was tonne-gret, of yren bright and shene.'[1]

Everywhere on the wall were representations of slaughter; and in the sanctuary

'The statue of Mars upon a carte stood
Armed, and loked grim as he were wood, . . .
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete
With eyen red, and of a man he ete.'[2]

Are not these contrasts well designed to rouse the imagination? You will meet in Chaucer a succession of similar pictures. Observe the train of combatants who came to joust in the tilting field for Arcite and Palamon:

'With him ther wenten knightes many on.
Som wol ben armed in an habergeon
And in a brestplate, and in a gipon;
And som wol have a pair of plates large;
And som wol have a Pruce sheld, or a targe,
Som wol ben armed on his legges wele,
And have an axe, and som a mace of stele. . . .
Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face.
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe.
And as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.
Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed sate ful of stones bright,

[1] *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 59, *v.* 1977–1996. [2] *Ibid.* p. 61, *v.* 2043–2050.

Of fine rubins and of diamants.
About his char ther wenten white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound,
Colered with gold, and torettes filed round.
An hundred lordes had he in his route,
Armed ful wel, with hertes sterne and stoute.
With Arcita, in stories as men find,
The gret Emetrius the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete.
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete;
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His crispe here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin . . .
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five and twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was well begonnen for to spring;
His vois was as a trompe thondering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond fresshe and lusty for to sene.
Upon his hond he bare for his deduit
An egle tame, as any lily whit.
An hundred lordes had he with him there,
All armed save hir hedes in all hir gere,
Ful richely in alle manere thinges. . . .
About this king ther ran on every part
Ful many a tame leon and leopart.'[1]

A herald would not describe them better nor more fully. The lords and ladies of the time would recognise here their tourneys and masquerades.

There is something more pleasant than a fine narrative, and that is a collection of fine narratives, especially when the narratives are all of different colourings. Froissart gives us such under the name of *Chronicles;* Boccacio still better; after him the lords of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles;* and, later still, Marguerite de Navarre. What more natural among people who meet, talk, and try to amuse themselves? The manners of the time suggest them; for the habits and tastes of society had begun, and fiction thus conceived only brings into books the conversations which are heard in the hall and by the wayside. Chaucer describes a troop of pilgrims, people of every rank, who are going to

[1] *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 63, *v.* 2120–2188.

Canterbury: a knight, a sergeant of law, an Oxford clerk, a doctor, a miller, a prioress, a monk, who agree to relate a story all round:

> 'For trewely comfort ne mirthe is non,
> To riden by the way domb as the ston.'

They relate accordingly; and on this slender and flexible thread all the jovialities of the feudal imagination, true and false, come and contribute their motley figures to the chain; alternately noble, chivalrous stories: the miracle of the infant whose throat was cut by Jews, the trials of patient Griselda, Canace and the marvellous fictions of Oriental fancy, obscene stories of marriage and monks, allegorical or moral tales, the fable of the cock and hen, a list of great unfortunate persons: Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Nebuchadnezzar, Zenobia, Crœsus, Ugolin, Peter of Spain. I leave out some, for I must be brief. Chaucer is like a jeweller with his hands full: pearls and glass beads, sparkling diamonds and common agates, black jet and ruby roses, all that history and imagination had been able to gather and fashion during three centuries in the East, in France, in Wales, in Provence, in Italy, all that had rolled his way, clashed together, broken or polished by the stream of centuries, and by the great jumble of human memory; he holds in his hand, arranges it, composes therefrom a long sparkling ornament, with twenty pendants, a thousand facets, which by its splendour, varieties, contrasts, may attract and satisfy the eyes of those most greedy for amusement and novelty.

He does more. The universal outburst of unchecked curiosity demands a more refined enjoyment; reverie and fantasy alone can satisfy it; not profound and thoughtful fantasy as we find it in Shakspeare, nor impassioned and meditated reverie as we find it in Dante, but the reverie and fantasy of the eyes, ears, external senses, which in poetry as in architecture call for singularity, wonders, accepted challenges, victories gained over what is rational and probable, and which are satisfied only by what is dense and dazzling. When you look at a cathedral of that time, you feel a sort of fear. Substance is wanting; the walls are hollowed out to make room for windows, the elaborate work of the porches, the wonderful growth of the slender columns, the thin curvature of arches—everything seems to totter; support has been withdrawn to give way to ornament. Without external prop or buttress, and artificial aid of iron clamp-work, the building would have crumbled to pieces on the first day: as it is, it undoes itself; we have to maintain on the spot a colony of masons continually to ward off the continual decay. But our eyes lose themselves in following the wavings and twistings of the endless fretwork; the dazzling centre-rose of the portal and the painted glass throw a diapered light on the carved stalls of the choir, the gold-work of the altar, the long array of damascened and glittering copes, the crowd of statues, gradually rising; and amid this violet light, this quivering purple, amid these arrows of gold which pierce the gloom, the building

is like the tail of a mystical peacock. So most of the poems of the time are barren of foundation; at most a trite morality serves them for mainstay: in short, the poet thought of nothing else than spreading out before us a glow of colours and a jumble of forms. They are dreams or visions; there are five or six in Chaucer, and you will meet more on your advance to the Renaissance. Yet the show is splendid. Chaucer is transported in a dream to a temple of glass,[1] where on the walls are figured in gold all the legends of Ovid and Virgil, an infinite train of characters and dresses, like that which, on the painted glass in the churches, still occupies the gaze of the faithful. Suddenly a golden eagle, which soars near the sun, and glitters like a carbuncle, descends with the swiftness of lightning, and carries him off in his talons above the stars, dropping him at last before the House of Fame, splendidly built of beryl, with shining windows and lofty turrets, and situated on a high rock of almost inaccessible ice. All the southern side was graven with the names of famous men, but the sun was continuously melting them. On the northern side, the names, better protected, still remained. On the turrets appeared the minstrels and jongleurs, with Orpheus, Orion, and the great harp-players, and behind them myriads of musicians, with horns, flutes, pipes, and reeds, in which they blew, and which filled the air; then all the charmers, magicians, and prophets. He enters, and in a high hall, wainscotted with gold, embossed with pearls, on a throne of carbuncle, he sees a woman seated, a 'gret and noble quene,' amidst an infinite number of heralds, whose embroidered cloaks bore the arms of the most famous knights in the world, and heard the sounds of instruments, and the celestial melody of Calliope and her sisters. From her throne to the gate stretched a row of pillars, on which stood the great historians and poets; Josephus on a pillar of lead and iron; Statius on a pillar of iron stained with blood; Ovid, 'Venus' clerk,' on a pillar of copper; then, on one higher than the rest, Homer and Livy, Dares the Phrygian, Guido Colonna, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the other historians of the war of Troy. Must I go on copying this phantasmagoria, in which confused erudition mars picturesque invention, and frequent banter shows sign that the vision is only a planned amusement? The poet and his reader have imagined for half an hour decorated halls and bustling crowds; a slender thread of common sense has ingeniously crept along the transparent golden mist which they amuse themselves with following. That suffices; they are pleased with their fleeting fancies, and ask nothing beyond.

Amid this exuberancy of mind, amid these refined cravings, and this insatiate exaltation of imagination and sense, there was the passion of love, which, combining all, was developed in excess, and displayed in short the sickly charm, the fundamental and fatal exaggeration, which are the characteristics of the age, and which, later, the Spanish civilisa-

[1] The House of Fame.

tion exhibits both in its flower and its decay. Long ago, the courts of love in Provence had established the theory. 'Each one who loves,' they said, 'grows pale at the sight of her whom he loves; each action of the lover ends in the thought of her whom he loves. Love can refuse nothing to love.'[1] This search after excessive sensation had ended in the ecstasies and transports of Guido Cavalcanti, and of Dante; and in Languedoc a company of enthusiasts had established themselves, love-penitents, who, in order to prove the violence of their passion, dressed in summer in furs and heavy garments, and in winter in light gauze, and walked thus about the country, so that many of them fell ill and died. Chaucer, in their wake, explained in his verses the craft of love,[2] the ten commandments, the twenty statutes of love; and praised his lady, his 'daieseye,' his 'Margaruite,' his 'vermeil rose;' depicted love in ballads, visions, allegories, didactic poems, in a hundred guises. This is chivalrous, lofty love, as it was conceived in the middle age; above all, tender love. Troïlus loves Cressida like a troubadour; without Pandarus, her uncle, he would have languished, and ended by dying in silence. He will not reveal the name of her he loves. Pandarus has to tear it from him, perform all the bold actions himself, plan every kind of stratagem. Troïlus, however brave and strong in battle, can but weep before Cressida, ask her pardon, and faint. Cressida exhibits every delicacy. When Pandarus brings her Troïlus' first letter, she begins by refusing it, and is ashamed to open it: she opens it only because she is told the poor knight is about to die. At the first words 'all rosy hewed tho woxe she;' and though the letter is respectful, she will not answer it. She yields at last to the importunities of her uncle, and answers Troïlus that she will feel for him the affection of a sister. As to Troïlus, he trembles all over, grows pale when he sees the messenger return, doubts his happiness, and will not believe the assurance which is given him:

'But right so as these holtes and these hayis
That han in winter dead ben and dry,
Revesten hem in grene, whan that May is. . . .
Right in that selfe wise, sooth for to sey,
Woxe suddainly his herte full of joy.'[3]

Slowly, after many pains, and thanks to the efforts of Pandarus, he obtains her confession; and in this confession what a delightful grace!

'And as the newe abashed nightingale,
That stinteth first, whan she beginneth sing,
Whan that she heareth any heerdes tale,
Or in the hedges any wight stearing,
And after siker doeth her voice outring:

[1] André le Chapelain, 1170.

[2] Also the *Court of Love*, and perhaps *The Assemble of Ladies* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.

[3] *Troïlus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 3, p. 12.

Right so Creseide, whan that her drede stent,
Opened her herte, and told him her entent.'[1]

He, as soon as he perceived a hope from afar,

'In chaunged voice, right for his very drede,
Which voice eke quoke, and thereto his manere,
Goodly abasht, and now his hewes rede,
Now pale, unto Cresseide his ladie dere,
With look doun cast, and humble iyolden chere,
Lo, the alderfirst word that him astart
Was twice: "Mercy, mercy, O my sweet herte!"'[2]

This ardent love breaks out in impassioned accents, in bursts of happiness. Far from being regarded as a fault, it is the source of all virtue. Troïlus becomes braver, more generous, more upright, through it; his speech runs now on love and virtue; he scorns all villany; he honours those who possess merit, succours those who are in distress; and Cressida, delighted, repeats all day, with exceeding tenderness, this song, which is like the warbling of a nightingale:

'Whom should I thanken but you, god of love,
Of all this blisse, in which to bathe I ginne?
And thanked be ye, lorde, for that I love,
This is the right life that I am inne,
To flemen all maner vice and sinne:
This doeth me so to vertue for to entende
That daie by daie I in my will amende.
And who that saieth that for to love is vice, . . .
He either is envious, or right nice,
Or is unmightie for his shreudnesse
To loven. . . .
But I with all mine herte and all my might,
As I have saied, woll love unto my last,
My owne dere herte, and all mine owne knight,
In whiche mine herte growen is so fast,
And his in me, that it shall ever last.'[3]

But misfortune comes. Her father Calchas demands her back, and the Trojans decide that they will give her up in exchange for prisoners. At this news she swoons, and Troïlus is about to slay himself. Their love at this time seems imperishable; it sports with death, because it constitutes the whole of life. Beyond that better and delicious life which it created, it seems there can be no other:

'But as God would, of swough she abraide,
And gan to sighe, and Troïlus she cride,
And he answerde: "Lady mine, Creseide,
Live ye yet?" and let his swerde doun glide:
"Ye herte mine, that thanked be Cupide,"

[1] *Troïlus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 3, p. 40.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 4.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. iv. bk. 2, p. 292.

(Quod she), and therewithal she sore sight,
And he began to glade her as he might.

Took her in armes two and kist her oft,
And her to glad, he did al his entent,
For which her gost, that flikered aie a loft,
Into her wofull herte ayen it went:
But at the last, as that her eye glent
Aside, anon she gan his sworde aspie,
As it lay bare, and gan for feare crie.

And asked him why had he it out draw,
And Troïlus anon the cause her told,
And how himself therwith he wold have slain,
For which Creseide upon him gan behold,
And gan him in her armes faste fold,
And said: "O mercy God, lo which a dede!
Alas, how nigh we weren bothe dede!"[1]

At last they are separated, with what words and what tears! and Troïlus, alone in his chamber, murmurs:

"'Where is mine owne lady lefe and dere?
Where is her white brest, where is it, where?
Where been her armes, and her eyen clere
That yesterday this time with me were?" . . .
Nor there nas houre in al the day or night,
Whan he was ther as no man might him here,
That he ne sayd: "O lovesome lady bright,
How have ye faren sins that ye were there?
Welcome ywis mine owne lady dere!" . . .
Fro thence-forth he rideth up and doune,
And every thing came him to remembraunce,
As he rode forth by the places of the toune,
In which he whilom had all his pleasaunce:
"Lo, yonder saw I mine owne lady daunce,
And in that temple with her eien clere,
Me caught first my right lady dere.
And yonder have I herde full lustely
My dere herte laugh, and yonder play
Saw her ones eke ful blisfully,
And yonder ones to me gan she say,
'Now, good sweete, love me well I pray.'
And yonde so goodly gan she me behold,
That to the death mine herte is to her hold.
And at the corner in the yonder house
Herde I mine alderlevest lady dere,
So womanly, with voice melodiouse,
Singen so wel, so goodly, and so clere,
That in my soule yet me thinketh I here
The blissful sowne, and in that yonder place,
My lady first me toke unto her grace.'"[2]

[1] *Troïlus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 4, p. 97.

[2] *Ibid.* bk. 5, p. 119 *et passim.*

None has since found more true and tender words. These are the charming 'poetic branches' which flourished amid the gross ignorance and pompous parades. Human intelligence in the middle age had blossomed on that side where it perceived the light.

But mere narrative does not suffice to express his felicity and fancy; the poet must go where 'shoures sweet of rain descended soft,'

'And every plaine was clothed faire
With new greene, and maketh small floures
To springen here and there in field and in mede,
So very good and wholsome be the shoures,
That it renueth that was old and dede,
In winter time; and out of every sede
Springeth the hearbe, so that every wight
Of this season wexeth glad and light. . . .

In which (grove) were okes great, streight as a line,
Under the which the grasse so fresh of hew
Was newly sprong, and an eight foot or nine.
Every tree well fro his fellow grew.'

He must forget himself in the vague felicity of the country, and, like Dante, lose himself in ideal light and allegory. The dreams of love, to continue true, must not take a too visible form, nor enter into a too consecutive history; they must float in a misty distance; the soul in which they hover cannot think of the laws of existence; it inhabits another world; it forgets itself in the ravishing emotion which troubles it, and sees its well-loved visions rise, mingle, come and go, as in summer we see the bees on a hill-slope flutter in a haze of light, and circle round and round the flowers.

One morning,[1] a lady sings, I entered at the dawn of day, I entered an oak-grove

'With branches brode, laden with leves new,
That sprongen out ayen the sunne-shene,
Some very red, and some a glad light grene. . .

And I, that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainely
There is no hert, I deme, in such dispaire,
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
So overlaid, but it should soone have bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood, and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I sie,
As full of blossomes as it might be;
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile

[1] *The Flower and the Leaf*, vi. p. 244, *v.* 6–32. [2] *Ibid.* p. 245, *v.* 33.

Fro bough to bough ; and, as him list, he eet
Here and there of buds and floures sweet. . . .

And as I sat, the birds harkening thus,
Methought that I heard voices sodainly,
The most sweetest and most delicious
That ever any wight, I trow truly,
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accord was in so good musike,
That the voice to angels most was like.'[1]

Then she sees arrive 'a world of ladies . . . in surcotes white of velvet . . . set with emerauds . . . as of great pearles round and orient, and diamonds fine and rubies red.' And all had on their head 'a rich fret of gold . . . full of stately riche stones set,' with 'a chapelet of branches fresh and grene . . . some of laurer, some of woodbind, some of agnus castus;' and at the same time came a train of valiant knights in splendid array, with 'harneis' of red gold, shining in the sun, and noble steeds, with trappings 'of cloth of gold, and furred with ermine.' These knights and dames were the servants of the Leaf, and they sate under a great oak, at the feet of their queen.'

From the other side came a bevy of ladies as resplendent as the first, but crowned with fresh flowers. These were the servants of the Flower. They alighted, and began to dance in the meadow. But heavy clouds appeared in the sky, and a storm broke out. They wished to shelter themselves under the oak, but there was no more room; they ensconced themselves as they could in the hedges and brambles; the rain came down and spoiled their garlands, stained their robes, and washed away their ornaments; when the sun returned, they went to ask succour from the queen of the Leaf; she, being merciful, consoled them, repaired the injury of the rain, and restored their original beauty. Then all disappears as in a dream.

The lady was astonished, when suddenly a fair dame appeared and instructed her. She learned that the servants of the Leaf had lived like brave knights, and those of the Flower had loved idleness and pleasure. She promises to serve the Leaf, and came away.

Is this an allegory? There is at least a lack of wit. There is no ingenious enigma; it is dominated by fancy, and the poet thinks only of displaying in soft verse the fleeting and brilliant train which had amused his mind and charmed his eyes.

Chaucer himself, on the first of May, rises and goes out into the meadows. Love enters his heart with the warm sweet air; the landscape is transfigured, and the birds begin to speak:

'There sate I downe among the faire flours,
And saw the birds trip out of hir bours,

[1] *The Flower and the Leaf*, vi. p. 246, *v.* 78–133.

There as they rested hem all the night,
They were so joyfull of the dayes light,
They began of May for to done honours.

They coud that service all by rote,
There was many a lovely note,
Some song loud as they had plained,
And some in other manner voice yfained
And some all out with the ful throte.

The proyned hem and made hem right gay,
And daunceden, and lepten on the spray,
And evermore two and two in fere,
Right so as they had chosen hem to yere,
In Feverere upon saint Valentines day.

And the river that I sate upon,
It made such a noise as it ron,
Accordaunt with the birdes armony,
Methought it was the best melody
That might ben yheard of any mon.'[1]

This confused harmony of vague noises troubles the sense; a secret languor enters the soul. The cuckoo throws his monotonous voice like a mournful and tender sigh between the white ash-tree boles; the nightingale makes his triumphant notes roll and rush above the leafy canopy; fancy breaks in unsought, and Chaucer hears them dispute of Love. They sing alternately an antistrophic song, and the nightingale weeps for vexation to hear the cuckoo speak in depreciation of Love. He is consoled, however, by the poet's voice, seeing that he also suffers with him:

'"For love and it hath doe me much wo."
"Ye, use" (quod she) "this medicine
Every day this May or thou dine
Go looke upon the fresh daisie,
And though thou be for wo in point to die,
That shall full greatly lessen thee of thy pine.

"And looke alway that thou be good and trew,
And I wol sing one of the songes new,
For love of thee, as loud as I may crie:"
And than she began this song full hie,
"I shrewe all hem that been of love untrue."'[2]

To such exquisite delicacies love, as with Petrarch, had carried poetry; by refinement even, as with Petrarch, it is lost now and then in its wit, conceits, clenches. But a marked characteristic at once separates it from Petrarch. Chaucer, if over-excited, is also graceful, polished, full of light banter, half-mockeries, fine sensual gaiety, some-

[1] *The Cuckow and Nightingale*, vi. p. 121, *v.* 67–85.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 126, *v.* 230–241.

what gossipy, as the French always paint love. He follows his true masters, and is himself an elegant speaker, facile, ever ready to smile, loving choice pleasures, a disciple of the *Roman de la Rose*, and much less Italian than French.[1] The bent of French character makes of love not a passion, but a gay feast, tastefully arranged, in which the service is elegant, the food exquisite, the silver brilliant, the two guests in full dress, in good humour, quick to anticipate and please each other, knowing how to keep up the gaiety, and when to part. In Chaucer, without doubt, this other altogether worldly view runs side by side with the sentimental element. If Troïlus is a weeping lover, his uncle Pandarus is a lively rascal, who volunteers for a singular service with amusing urgency, frank immorality, and carries it out carefully, gratuitously, thoroughly. In these pretty attempts Chaucer accompanies him as far as possible, and is not shocked. On the contrary, he makes fun out of it. At the critical moment, with transparent hypocrisy, he shelters himself under his character as author. If you find the particulars free, he says, it is not my fault; 'so writen clerks in hir bokes old,' and 'I mote, aftir min auctour, telle . . .' Not only is he gay, but he jests from end to end of the tale. He sees clearly through the tricks of feminine modesty; he laughs at it maliciously, knowing well what is behind; he seems to be saying, finger on lip: 'Hush! let the grand words roll on, you will be edified presently.' We are, in fact, edified; so is he, and in the nick of time he goes away, carrying the light: 'For ought I can aspies, this light nor I ne serven here of nought.' 'Troïlus,' says uncle Pandarus, 'if ye be wise, sweveneth not now, lest more folke arise.' Troïlus takes care not to swoon; and Cressida at last, being alone with him, speaks wittily and with prudent delicacy; there is here an exceeding charm, no coarseness. Their happiness covers all, even voluptuousness, as with profusion and perfume of heavenly roses. At most a slight spice of malice flavours it: 'and gode thrift he had full oft.' Troïlus holds his mistress in his arms: 'with worse hap God let us never mete.' The poet is almost as well pleased as they: for him, as for the men of his time, the sovereign good is love, not damped, but satisfied; they ended even by thinking such love a merit. The ladies declared in their judgments, that when one loved, one could refuse nothing to the beloved. Love has the force of law; it is inscribed in a code; they combine it with religion; and there is a sacrament of love, in which the birds in their anthems sing matins.[2] Chaucer curses with all his heart the covetous wretches, the business men, who treat it as a folly:

> 'As would God, tho wretches that despise
> Service of love had eares also long
> As had Mida, ful of covetise, . . .

[1] Stendhal, *On Love:* the difference of Love-taste and Love-passion.

[2] *The Court of Love*, about 1353 et seq. See also the *Testament of Love*.

To teachen hem, that they been in the vice
And lovers not, although they hold hem nice,
. . . God yeve hem mischaunce,
And every lover in his trouth avaunce.'[1]

He clearly lacks severity, so rare in southern literature. The Italians in the middle age made joy into a virtue; and you perceive that the world of chivalry, as conceived by the French, expanded morality so as to confound it with pleasure.

IV.

There are other characteristics still more gay. The true Gallic literature crops up; obscene tales, practical jokes on one's neighbour, not shrouded in the Ciceronian style of Boccacio, but related lightly by a man in good humour;[2] above all, active malice, the trick of laughing at your neighbour's expense. Chaucer displays it better than Rutebeuf, and sometimes better than La Fontaine. He does not knock his men down; he pricks them as he passes, not from deep hatred or indignation, but through sheer nimbleness of disposition, and quick sense of the ridiculous; he throws his jokes at them by handfuls. His man of law is more a man of business than of the world:

'Nowher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he semed besier than he was.'[3]

His three burgesses:

'Everich, for the wisdom that he can
Was shapelich for to ben an alderman.
For catel hadden they ynough and rent,
And eke hir wives wolde it wel assent.'[4]

Of the mendicant Friar he says:

'His wallet lay beforne him in his lappe,
Bret-ful of pardon come from Rome al hote.'[5]

The mockery here comes from the heart, in the French manner, without effort, calculation, or vehemence. It is so pleasant and so natural to banter one's neighbour! Sometimes the lively vein becomes so abundant, that it furnishes an entire comedy, indelicate certainly, but so free and easy! Such a one is the portrait of the Wife of Bath, who has buried five husbands:

'Bold was hire face, and fayre and rede of hew,
She was a worthy woman all hire live;
Housbondes at the chirche dore had she had five,
Withouten other compagnie in youthe. . . .

[1] *Troïlus and Cressida*, vol. v. iii. pp. 44, 45.

[2] The story of the pear-tree (Merchant's Tale), and of the cradle (Reeve's Tale), for instance, in the *Canterbury Tales*.

[3] *Ibid. prol.* p. 10, *v.* 323. [4] *Ibid.* p. 12, *v.* 373. [5] *Ibid.* p. 21, *v.* 688.

In all the parish wif ne was ther non,
That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee.'[1]

What a tongue she has! Impertinent, full of vanity, bold, chattering, unbridled, she silences everybody, and holds forth for an hour before coming to her tale. We hear her grating, high-pitched, loud, clear voice, wherewith she deafened her husbands. She continually harps upon the same ideas, repeats her reasons, piles them up and confounds them, like a stubborn mule who runs along shaking and ringing his bells, so that the stunned listeners remain open-mouthed, wondering that a single tongue can spin out so many words. The subject was worth the trouble. She proves that she did well to marry five husbands, and she proves it clearly, like a woman used to arguing:

'God bad us for to wex and multiplie;
That gentil text can I wel understond;
Eke wel I wot, he sayd, that min husbond
Shuld leve fader and moder, and take to me;
But of no noumbre mention made he,
Of bigamie or of octogamie;
Why shuld men than speke of it vilanie?
Lo here the wise king Dan Solomon,
I trow he hadde wives mo than on,
(As wolde God it leful were to me
To be refreshed half so oft as he,)
Which a gift of God had he for alle his wives? . . .
Blessed be God that I have wedded five.
Welcome the sixthe whan that ever he shall. . . .
He (Christ) spake to hem that wold live parfitly,
And lordings, (by your leve) that am nat I; . . .
I wol bestow the flour of all myn age
In th' actes and the fruit of mariage. . . .
An husbond wol I have, I wol not lette,
Which shal be both my dettour and my thrall,
And have his tribulation withall
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wif.'[2]

Here Chaucer has the freedom of Molière, and we possess it no longer. His good wife justifies marriage in terms just as technical as Sganarelle. It behoves us to turn the pages quickly, and follow in the lump only this Odyssey of marriage. The experienced wife, who has journeyed through life with five husbands, knows the art of taming them, and relates how she persecuted them with jealousy, suspicion, grumbling, quarrels, blows given and received; how the husband, non-

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *prologue*, p. 14, *v.* 460.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, p. 168, *v.* 5610–5739.

plussed by the continuity of the tempest, stooped at last, accepted the halter, and turned the domestic mill like a conjugal and resigned ass:

'For as an hors, I coude bite and whine;
I coude plain, and I was in the gilt. . . .
I plained first, so was our werre ystint.
They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blive
Of thing, the which they never agilt hir live. . . .
I swore that all my walking out by night
Was for to espien wenches that he dight. . . .
For though the pope had sitten hem beside,
I wold not spare hem at hir owen bord. . . .
But certainly I made folk swiche chere,
That in his owen grese I made him frie
For anger, and for veray jalousie.
By God, in erth I was his purgatorie,
For which I hope his soule be in glorie.'[1]

She saw the fifth first at the burial of the fourth:

'And Jankin oure clerk was on of tho:
As helpe me God, whan that I saw him go
Aftir the bere, me thought he had a paire
Of legges and of feet, so clene and faire,
That all my herte I yave unto his hold.
He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,
And I was fourty, if I shal say soth. . . .
As helpe me God, I was a lusty on,
And faire, and riche, and yonge, and well begon.'[2]

What a speech! Was human delusion ever more happily painted? How lifelike is all, and how facile! It is the satire of marriage. You will find it twenty times in Chaucer. Nothing more is wanted to exhaust the two subjects of French mockery, than to unite with the satire of marriage the satire of religion.

It is here; and Rabelais is not more bitter. The monk whom Chaucer paints is a hypocrite, a jolly fellow, who knows good inns and jovial hosts better than the poor and the houses of charity:

'A Frere there was, a wanton and a mery . . .
Ful wel beloved, and familier was he
With frankeleins over all in his contree,
And eke with worthy wimmen of the toun. . . .
Full swetely herde he confession,
And plesant was his absolution.
He was an esy man to give penance,
Ther as he wiste to han a good pitance:
For unto a poure ordre for to give
Is signe that a man is wel yshrive. . . .
And knew wel the tavernes in every toun,

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, p. 179, *v.* 5968-6072.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 185, *v.* 6177-6188.

And every hosteler and gay tapstere,
Better than a lazar and a beggere. . . .
It is not honest, it may not avance,
As for to delen with no swich pouraille,
But all with riche and sellers of vitaille. . . .
For many a man so hard is of his herte,
He may not wepe, although him sore smerte.
Therfore in stede of weping and praieres,
Men mote give silver to the poure freres.'[1]

This lively irony had an exponent before in Jean de Meung. But Chaucer pushes it further, and sets it in action. His monk begs from house to house, holding out his wallet:

'In every hous he gan to pore and prie,
And begged mele and chese, or elles corn. . . .
"Yeve us a bushel whete, or malt, or reye,
A Goddes kichel, or a trippe of chese,
Or elles what you list, we may not chese;
A Goddes halfpeny, or a masse peny;
Or yeve us of your braun, if ye have any,
A dagon of your blanket, leve dame,
Our suster dere, (lo here I write your name)." . . .
And whan that he was out at dore, anon,
He planed away the names everich on.'[2]

He has kept for the end of his tour, Thomas, one of his most liberal clients. He finds him in bed, and ill; here is an excellent fruit to suck and squeeze:

'"God wot," quod he, "laboured have I ful sore,
And specially for thy salvation,
Have I sayd many a precious orison. . . .
I have this day ben at your chirche at messe . .
And ther I saw our dame, a, wher is she?"'[3]

The dame enters:

'This frere ariseth up ful curtisly,
And hire embraceth in his armes narwe,
And kisseth hire swete and chirketh as a sparwe.'[4] . . .

Then, in his sweetest and most caressing voice, he compliments her, and says:

'"Thanked be God that you yaf soule and lif,
Yet saw I not this day so faire a wif
In all the chirche, God so save me."'[5]

Have we not here already Tartuffe and Elmire? But the monk is with a farmer, and can go more straight and quick to his task. Compliments

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[1] *Canterbury Tales, prologue*, ii. p. 7, *v.* 208 *et passim.*
[2] *Ibid. The Sompnoures Tale*, ii. p. 220, *v.* 7319–7340.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 221, *v.* 7366. [4] *Ibid.* p. 221, *v.* 7384. [5] *Ibid.* p. 222, *v.* 7389.

ended, he thinks of the substance, and asks the lady to let him talk alone with Thomas. He must inquire after the state of his soul:

'"I wol with Thomas speke a litel throw:
Thise curates ben so negligent and slow
To gropen tendrely a conscience. . . .
Now, dame," quod he, "*jeo vous die sanz doute*,
Have I nat of a capon but the liver,
And of your white bred nat but a shiver,
And after that a rosted pigges hed,
(But I ne wolde for me no beest were ded,)
Than had I with you homly suffisance.
I am a man of litel sustenance,
My spirit hath his fostring in the Bible.
My body is ay so redy and penible
To waken, that my stomak is destroied."'[1]

Poor man, he raises his hands to heaven, and ends with a sigh.

The wife tells him her child died a fortnight before. Straightway he composes a miracle; was he not earning his money? He had a revelation of this death in the 'dortour' of the convent; he saw the child carried to paradise; he rose with his brothers, 'with many a tere trilling on our cheke,' and they sang a Te Deum:

'"For, sire and dame, trusteth me right wel,
Our orisons ben more effectuel,
And more we seen of Cristes secree thinges
Than borel folk, although that they be kinges.
We live in poverte, and in abstinence,
And borel folk in richesse and dispence. . . . .
Lazar and Dives liveden diversely,
And divers guerdon hadden they therby."'[2]

Presently he spurts out a whole sermon, in monkish style, with manifest intention. The sick man, wearied, replies that he has already given half his fortune to all kinds of monks, and yet he continually suffers. Listen to the grieved exclamation, the true anger of the mendicant monk, who sees himself threatened by the meeting with a brother to share his client, his revenue, his booty, his food-supplies:

'The frere answered: "O Thomas, dost thou so?
What nedeth you diverse freres to seche?
What nedeth him that hath a parfit leche,
To sechen other leches in the toun?
Your inconstance is your confusion.
Hold ye than me, or elles our covent,
To pray for you ben insufficient?
Thomas, that jape n' is not worth a mite,
Your maladie is for we han to lite."'[3]

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[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 222, *v.* 7397–7429.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 223, *v.* 7450–7460. [3] *Ibid.* p. 226, *v.* 7536–7544.

Recognise the great orator; he employs even the grand style to keep the supplies from being cut off:

> '"A, yeve that covent half a quarter otes;
> And yeve that covent four and twenty grotes;
> And yeve that frere a peny, and let him go:
> Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no thing be so.
> What is a ferthing worth parted on twelve?
> Lo, eche thing that is oned in himselve
> Is more strong, than whan it is yscatered . . .
> Thou woldest han our labour al for nought."'[1]

Then he begins again his sermon in a louder tone, shouting at each word, quoting examples from Seneca and the classics, a terrible fluency, a trick of his trade, which, diligently applied, must draw money from the patient. He asks for gold, 'to make our cloistre,'

> '. . . "And yet, God wot, uneth the fundament
> Parfourmed is, ne of our pavement
> N' is not a tile yet within our wones:
> By God, we owen fourty pound for stones.
> Now help, Thomas, for him that harwed helle,
> For elles mote we oure bokes selle,
> And if ye lacke oure predication,
> Than goth this world all to destruction.
> For who so fro this world wold us bereve,
> So God me save, Thomas, by your leve,
> He wold bereve out of this world the sonne."'[2]

In the end, Thomas, in a rage, promises him a gift, tells him to put his hand in the bed and take it, and sends him away duped, mocked, and defiled.

We have descended now to popular farce: when amusement must be had at any price, it is sought, as here, in broad jokes, even in filthiness. We can see how these two coarse and vigorous plants have blossomed in the dung of the middle age. Planted by the cunning men of Champagne and Ile-de-France, watered by the *trouvères*, they were destined fully to expand, bespattered and ruddy, in the hands of Rabelais. Meanwhile Chaucer plucks his nosegay from it. Deceived husbands, tricked innkeepers, accidents in bed, kicks, and robberies,—these suffice to raise a hearty laugh. Side by side with noble pictures of chivalry, he gives us a train of Flemish grotesque figures, carpenters, joiners, friars, summoners; blows abound, fists descend on fleshy backs; many nudities are shown; they swindle one another out of their corn, their wives; they pitch one another out of a window; they brawl and quarrel. A bruise, a piece of open filthiness, passes in such society for a sign of wit. The summoner, being rallied by the friar, gives him tit for tat:

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[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 226, *v.* 7545–7553.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 230, *v.* 7685–7695.

"'This Frere bosteth that he knoweth helle,
And, God it wot, that is but litel wonder,
Freres and fendes ben but litel asonder.
For parde, ye han often time herd telle
How that a Frere ravished was to helle
In spirit ones by a visioun,
And as an angel lad him up and doun,
To shewen him the peines that ther were, . . .
And unto Sathanas he lad him doun.
(And now hath Sathanas," saith he, "a tayl
Broder than of a carrike is the sayl.)
Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas, quod he,
. . . . . and let the Frere see
Wher is the nest of Freres in this place.
And er than half a furlong way of space,
Right so as bees out swarmen of an hive,
Out of the devils . . . ther gonnen to drive,
A twenty thousand Freres on a route,
And thurghout hell they swarmed al aboute,
And com agen, as fast as they may gon."'[1]

Such were the coarse buffooneries of the popular imagination.

V.

It is high time to return to Chaucer himself. Beyond the two notable characteristics which settle his place in his age and school of poetry, there are others which take him out of his age and school. If he was romantic and gay like the rest, it was after a fashion of his own. He observes characters, notes their differences, studies the coherence of their parts, endeavours to bring forward living and distinct persons,—a thing unheard of in his time, but which the renovators in the sixteenth century, and first amongst them Shakspeare, will do afterwards. It is the English positive good sense, and aptitude for seeing the inside of things, beginning to appear. A new spirit, almost manly, pierces through, in literature as in painting, with Chaucer as with Van Eyck, with both at the same time; no longer the childish imitation of chivalrous life[2] or monastic devotion, but the grave spirit of inquiry and craving for deep truths, whereby art becomes complete. For the first time, in Chaucer as in Van Eyck, character stands out in relief; its parts are held together; it is no longer an unsubstantial phantom. You may comprehend its past and see its present action. Its externals manifest the personal and incommunicable details of its inner nature, and the infinite complexity of its economy and motion. To this day, after four centuries, that character is individualised, and typical; it remains distinct in our memory, like the creations of Shakspeare and

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnour's Prologue*, p. 217, *v.* 7254–7279.

[2] See in *The Canterbury Tales* the Rhyme of Sir Topas, a parody on the chivalric histories. Each character there seems a precursor of Cervantes.

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Rubens. We observe this growth in the very act. Not only does Chaucer, like Boccacio, bind his tales into a single history; but in addition—and this is wanting in Boccacio—he begins with the portrait of all his narrators, knight, summoner, man of law, monk, bailiff or reeve, host, about thirty distinct figures, of every sex, condition, age, each painted with his disposition, face, costume, turns of speech, little significant actions, habits, antecedents, each maintained in his character by his talk and subsequent actions, so well, that we can discern here, before any other nation, the germ of the domestic novel as we write it to-day. Think of the portraits of the franklin, the miller, the mendicant friar, and merchant. There are plenty of others which show the broad brutalities, the coarse tricks, and the pleasantries of vulgar life, as well as the gross and plentiful feastings of sensual life. Here and there honest old soldiers, who double their fists, and tuck up their sleeves; or the contented beadles, who, when they have drunk, will speak nothing but Latin. But by the side of these there are select characters; the knight, who went on a crusade to Granada and Prussia, brave and courteous:

'And though that he was worthy he was wise,
And of his port as meke as is a mayde.
He never yet no vilanie ne sayde
In alle his lif, unto no manere wight,
He was a veray parfit gentil knight.'[1]

'With him, ther was his sone, a yonge Squier,
A lover, and a lusty bacheler,
With lockes crull as they were laide in presse.
Of twenty yere of age he was I gesse.
Of his stature he was of even lengthe,
And wonderly deliver, and grete of strengthe.
And he hadde be somtime in chevachie,
In Flaundres, in Artois, and in Picardie,
And borne him wel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his ladies grace.
Embrouded was he, as it were a mede
Alle ful of fresshe floures, white and rede.
Singing he was, or floyting alle the day,
He was as fresshe, as is the moneth of May.
Short was his goune, with sleves long and wide.
Wel coude he sitte on hors, and fayre ride.
He coude songes make, and wel endite,
Juste and eke dance, and wel pourtraie and write.
So hote he loved, that by nightertale
He slep no more than doth the nightingale.
Curteis he was, lowly and servisable,
And carf befor his fader at the table.'[2]

There is also a poor and learned clerk of Oxford; and finer still, and

[1] Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 3, *v.* 68–72. [2] *Ibid.* p. 3, *v.* 79–100.

more worthy of a modern hand, the Prioress, 'Madame Eglantine,' who as a nun, a maiden, a great lady, is ceremonious, and shows sign of exquisite taste. Would a better be found now-a-days in a German chapter, amid the most modest and lively bevy of sentimental and literary canonesses?

'Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy;
Hire gretest othe n'as but by Seint Eloy;
And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.
Ful wel she sange the service devine,
Entuned in hire nose ful swetely;
And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford-atte-bowe,
For Frenche of Paris was to hire unknowe.
At mete was she wel ytaughte withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.
Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
Thatte no drope ne fell upon hire brest.
In curtesie was sette ful moche hire lest.
Hir over lippe wiped she so clene,
That in hire cuppe was no ferthing sene
Of grese, whan she dronken hadde hire draught,
Ful semely after hire mete she raught.
And sikerly she was of grete disport,
And ful plesant, and amiable of port,
And peined hire to contrefeten chere
Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.'[1]

Are you offended by these provincial affectations? On the contrary, it is delightful to behold these nice and pretty ways, these little affectations, the waggery and prudery, the half-worldly, half-monastic smile. We inhale a delicate feminine perfume, preserved and grown old under the stomacher:

'But for to speken of hire conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede.
But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,
Or if men smote it with a yerde smert:
And all was conscience and tendre herte.'[2]

Many elderly ladies throw themselves into such affections as these, for lack of others. Elderly! what an objectionable word have I employed! She was not elderly:

[1] Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 4, *v.* 118–141. [2] *Ibid.* p. 5, *v.* 142–150.

'Ful semely hire wimple ypinched was,
Hire nose tretis; hire eyen grey as glas;
Hire mouth ful smale, and therto soft and red;
But sikerly she hadde a fayre forehed.
It was almost a spanne brode I trowe;
For hardily she was not undergrowe.
Ful fetise was hire cloke, as I was ware.
Of smal corall aboute hire arm she bare
A pair of bedes, gauded al with grene;
And thereon heng a broche of gold ful shene,
On whiche was first ywriten a crouned A,
And after, *Amor vincit omnia*.'[1]

A pretty ambiguous device for gallantry or devotion; the lady was both of the world and the cloister: of the world, you may see it in her dress; of the cloister, you gather it from 'another Nonne also with hire hadde she, that was hire chapelleine, and Preestes thre;' from the Ave Maria which she sings, the long edifying stories which she relates. She is like a fresh, sweet, and ruddy cherry, made to ripen in the sun, but which, preserved in an ecclesiastical jar, is candied and made insipid in the syrup.

Such is the reflection which begins to dawn, such the high art. Chaucer studies here, rather than aims at amusement; he ceases to gossip, and thinks; instead of surrendering himself to the facility of glowing improvisation, he plans. Each tale is suited to the teller: the young squire relates a fantastic and Oriental history; the tipsy miller a loose and comical story; the honest clerk the touching legend of Griselda. All these tales are bound together, and that much better than by Boccacio, by little veritable incidents, which spring from the characters of the personages, and such as we light upon in our travels. The horsemen ride on in good humour in the sunshine, in the open country; they converse. The miller has drunk too much ale, and will speak, 'and for no man forbere.' The cook goes to sleep on his beast, and they play practical jokes on him. The monk and the summoner get up a dispute about their respective lines of business. The host restores peace, makes them speak or be silent, like a man who has long presided in the inn parlour, and who has often had to check brawlers. They pass judgment on the stories they listen to: declaring that there are few Griseldas in the world; laughing at the misadventures of the tricked carpenter; drawing a lesson from the moral tale. The poem is no longer, as in contemporary literature, a mere procession, but a painting in which the contrasts are arranged, the attitudes chosen, the general effect calculated, so that life is invigorated; we forget ourselves at the sight, as in the case of every life-like work; and we conceive the desire to get on horseback on a fine sunny morning, and

[1] Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, v. 151-162.

canter along green meadows with the pilgrims to the shrine of the good saint of Canterbury.

Weigh the value of this general effect. Is it a dream or not, in its maturity or infancy? The whole future is before us. Savages or half savages, warriors of the Heptarchy or knights of the middle-age; up to this period, no one had reached to this point. They had strange emotions, tender at times, and they expressed them each according to the gift of his race, some by short cries, others by continuous babble. But they did not command or guide their impressions; they sang or conversed by impulse, at hazard, according to the bent of their disposition, leaving their ideas to present themselves, and to take the lead; and when they hit upon order, it was ignorantly and involuntarily. Here for the first time appears a superiority of intellect, which at the instant of conception suddenly halts, rises above itself, passes judgment, and says to itself, 'This phrase tells the same thing as the last—remove it; these two ideas are disjointed—bind them together; this description is feeble—reconsider it.' When a man can speak thus he has an idea, not learned in the schools, but personal and practical, of the human mind, its process and needs, and of things also, their composition and combinations; he has a style, that is, he is capable of making everything understood and seen by the human mind. He can extract from every object, landscape, situation, character, the special and significant marks, so as to group and arrange them, to compose an artificial work which surpasses the natural work in its purity and completeness. He is capable, as Chaucer was, of seeking out in the old common forest of the middle-ages, stories and legends, to replant them in his own soil, and make them send out new shoots. He has the right and the power, as Chaucer had, of copying and translating, because by dint of retouching he impresses on his translations and copies his original mark; he recreates what he imitates, because through or by the side of worn-out fancies and monotonous stories, he can display, as Chaucer did, the charming ideas of an amiable and elastic mind, the thirty master-forms of the fourteenth century, the splendid freshness of the moist landscape and spring-time of England. He is not far from conceiving an idea of truth and life. He is on the brink of independent thought and fertile discovery. This was Chaucer's position. At the distance of a century and a half, he has affinity with the poets of Elizabeth[1] by his gallery of pictures, and with the reformers of the sixteenth century by his portrait of the good parson.

Affinity merely. He advanced a few steps beyond the threshold of

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[1] Tennyson, in his *Dream of Fair Women*, sings:

'Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath
Preluded those melodious bursts, that fill
The spacious times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still.'—TR.

his art, but he paused in the vestibule. He half opens the great door of the temple, but does not take his seat there; at most, he sat down at intervals. In *Arcite and Palamon*, in *Troïlus and Cressida*, he sketches sentiments, but does not create characters; he easily and ingeniously traces the winding course of events and conversations, but does not mark the precise outline of a striking figure. If occasionally, as in the description of the temple of Mars, after the *Thebaid* of Statius, feeling at his back the glowing breeze of poetry, he draws out his feet, clogged with the mud of the middle-age, and at a bound stands upon the poetic plain on which Statius imitated Virgil and equalled Lucan, he, at other times, again falls back into the childish gossip of the trouvères, or the stale pedantry of learned clerks—to 'Dan Phebus or Apollo-Delphicus.' Elsewhere, a commonplace remark on art intrudes in the midst of an impassioned description. He uses three thousand verses to conduct Troïlus to his first interview. He is like a precocious and poetical child, who mingles in his love-dreams quotations from his prayer-book and recollections of his alphabet.[1] Even in the *Canterbury Tales* he repeats himself, unfolds artless developments, forgets to concentrate his passion or his idea. He begins a jest, and scarcely ends it. He dilutes a bright colouring in a monotonous stanza. His voice is like that of a boy breaking into manhood. At first a manly and firm accent is maintained, then a shrill sweet sound shows that his growth is not finished, and that his strength is subject to weakness. Chaucer sets out as if to quit the middle-age; but in the end he is there still. To-day he composes the *Canterbury Tales;* yesterday he was translating the *Roman de la Rose.* To-day he is studying the complicated machinery of the heart, discovering the issues of primitive education or of the ruling disposition, and realising the comedy of manners; to-morrow, he will have no pleasure but in curious events, smooth allegories, amorous discussions, imitated from the French, or learned moralities from the ancients. Alternately he is an observer and a trouvère; instead of the step he ought to have advanced, he has but made a half-step.

Who has prevented him, and the others who surround him? We meet with the obstacle in his tale of *Melibeus*, of the *Parson*, in his *Testament of Love;* in short, so long as he writes verse, he is at his ease; as soon as he takes to prose, a sort of chain winds around his feet and stops him. His imagination is free, and his reasoning a slave. The rigid scholastic divisions, the mechanical manner of arguing and

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1 Speaking of Cressida, IV., book i. p. 236, he says:

'Right as our first letter is now an a,
In beautie first so stood she makeles,
Her goodly looking gladed all the prees,
Nas never seene thing to be praised so derre,
Nor under cloude blacke so bright a sterre.'

replying, the ergo, the Latin quotations, the authority of Aristotle and the Fathers, come and weigh down his budding thought. His native invention disappears under the discipline imposed. The servitude is so heavy, that even in his *Testament of Love*, amid the most touching plaints and the most smarting pains, the beautiful ideal lady whom he has always served, the heavenly mediator who appears to him in a vision, Love, sets her theses, establishes that the cause of a cause is the cause of the thing caused, and reasons as pedantically as they would at Oxford. In what can talent, even genius, end, when it loads itself with such shackles? What succession of original truths and new doctrines could be found and proved, when in a moral tale, like that of *Melibeus* and his wife Prudence, it was thought necessary to establish a formal controversy, to quote Seneca and Job, to forbid tears, to bring forward the weeping Christ to authorise tears, to enumerate every proof, to call in Solomon, Cassiodorus, and Cato; in short, to write a book for schools? The public has only pleasant and lively thoughts; not serious and general ideas; they are retained in the possession of others. As soon as Chaucer gets into a reflective mood, straightway Saint Thomas, Peter Lombard, the manual of sins, the treatise on definition and syllogism, the army of the ancients and of the Fathers, descend from their glory, enter his brain, speak in his stead; and the trouvère's amiable voice becomes, though he has no suspicion of it, the dogmatic and sleep-inspiring voice of a doctor. In love and satire he has experience, and he invents; in what regards morality and philosophy he has learning, and remembers. For an instant, by a solitary leap, he entered upon the close observation and the genuine study of man; he could not keep his ground, he did not take his seat, he took a poetic excursion; and no one followed him. The level of the century is lower; he is on it himself for the most part. He is in the company of narrators like Froissart, of elegant speakers like Charles of Orléans, of gossipy and barren verse-writers like Gower, Lydgate, and Occleve. There is no fruit, but frail and fleeting blossom, many useless branches, still more dying or dead branches; such is this literature. And why? Because it had no longer a root; after three centuries of effort, a heavy instrument cut it underground. This instrument was the Scholastic Philosophy.

VI.

Beneath every literature there is a philosophy. Beneath every work of art is an idea of nature and of life; this idea leads the poet. Whether the author knows it or not, he writes in order to exhibit it; and the characters which he fashions, like the events which he arranges, only serve to bring to light the dim creative conception which raises and combines them. Underlying Homer appears the noble life of heroic paganism and of happy Greece. Underlying Dante, the sad and violent life of fanatical Catholicism and of the much-hating Italians. From either we

might draw a theory of man and of the beautiful. It is so with others; and this is how, according to the variations, the birth, blossom, death, or sluggishness of the master-idea, literature varies, is born, flourishes, degenerates, comes to an end. Whoever plants the one, plants the other; whoever undermines the one, undermines the other. Place in all the minds of any age a new grand idea of nature and life, so that they feel and produce it with their whole heart and strength, and you will see them, seized with the craving to express it, invent forms of art and groups of figures. Take away from these minds every grand new idea of nature and life, and you will see them, deprived of the craving to express all-important thoughts, copy, sink into silence, or rave.

What has become of these all-important thoughts? What labour worked them out? What studies nourished them? The labourers did not lack zeal. In the twelfth century the energy of their minds was admirable. At Oxford there were thirty thousand scholars. No building in Paris could contain the crowd of Abelard's disciples; when he retired to solitude, they accompanied him in such a multitude, that the desert became a town. No suffering repulsed them. There is a story of a young boy, who, though beaten by his master, was wholly bent on remaining with him, that he might still learn. When the terrible encyclopedia of Aristotle was introduced, all disfigured and unintelligible, it was devoured. The only question presented to them, that of universals, so abstract and dry, so embarrassed by Arabic obscurities and Greek subtilties, during three centuries, was seized upon eagerly. Heavy and awkward as was the instrument supplied to them, I mean syllogism, they made themselves masters of it, rendered it still more heavy, used it upon every object, in every sense. They constructed monstrous books, by multitudes, cathedrals of syllogism, of unheard of architecture, of prodigious exactness, heightened in effect by intensity of intellectual power, which the whole sum of human labour has only twice been able to match.[1] These young and valiant minds thought they had found the temple of truth; they rushed at it headlong, in legions, breaking in the doors, clambering over the walls, leaping into the interior, and so found themselves at the bottom of a moat. Three centuries of labour at the bottom of this black moat added no single idea to the human mind.

For consider the questions which they treat of. They seem to be marching, but are merely marking time. One would say, to see them moil and toil, that they will educe from heart and brain some great original creed; all belief was imposed upon them from the outset.

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[1] Under Proclus and Hegel. Duns Scotus, at the age of thirty-one, died, leaving beside his sermons and commentaries, twelve folio volumes, in a small close handwriting, in a style like Hegel's, on the same subject as Proclus treats of. Similarly with Saint Thomas and the whole train of schoolmen. No idea can be formed of such a labour before handling the books themselves.

The system was made; they could only arrange and comment upon it. The conception comes not from them, but from Constantinople. Infinitely complicated and subtle as it is, the finishing work of Oriental mysticism and Greek metaphysics, so disproportioned to their young understanding, they exhaust themselves to reproduce it, and moreover burden their unpractised hands with the weight of a logical instrument which Aristotle created for theory and not for practice, and which ought to have remained in a cabinet of philosophical curiosities, without being ever carried into the field of action. 'Whether the divine essence engendered the Son, or was engendered by the Father; why the three persons together are not greater than one alone; attributes determine persons, not substance, that is, nature; how properties can exist in the nature of God, and not determine it; if created spirits are local and circumscribed; if God can know more things than He is aware of;'[1]—these are the ideas which they moot: what truth could issue thence? From hand to hand the chimera grows, and spreads wider its gloomy wings. 'Can God cause that, the place and body being retained, the body shall have no position, that is, existence in place?—Whether the impossibility of being engendered is a constituent property of the First Person of the Trinity—Whether identity, similitude, and equality are real relations in God.'[2] Duns Scotus distinguishes three kinds of matter: matter which is firstly first, secondly first, thirdly first. According to him, we must clear this triple hedge of thorny abstractions in order to understand the production of a sphere of brass. Under such a regimen, imbecility soon makes its appearance. Saint Thomas himself considers, 'whether the body of Christ arose with its wounds,—whether this body moves with the motion of the host and the chalice in consecration,—whether at the first instant of conception Christ had the use of free judgment,—whether Christ was slain by Himself or by another?' Do you think you are at the limits of human folly? Listen. He considers 'whether the dove in which the Holy Spirit appeared was a real animal,—whether a glorified body can occupy one and the same place at the same time as another glorified body,—whether in the state of innocence all children were masculine?' I pass over others as to the digestion of Christ, and some still more untranslatable.[3] This is the point reached by the most esteemed doctor, the most judicious mind, the Bossuet of the middle-age. Even in this ring of inanities the

[1] Peter Lombard, *Book of Sentences*. It was the classic of the middle-age.

[2] Duns Scotus, ed. 1639.

[3] Utrum angelus diligat se ipsum dilectione naturali vel electiva? Utrum in statu innocentiæ fuerit generatio per coitum? Utrum omnes fuissent nati in sexu masculino? Utrum cognitio angeli posset dici matutina et vespertina? Utrum martyribus aureola debeatur? Utrum virgo Maria fuerit virgo in concipiendo? Utrum remanserit virgo post partum? The reader would do well to look out in the text the reply to these last two questions. (S. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. 1677.)

answers are laid down. Roscelin and Abelard were excommunicated, exiled, imprisoned, because they swerved from it. There is a complete minute dogma which closes all issues; there is no means of escaping; after a hundred wriggles and a hundred efforts, you must come and tumble into a formula. If by mysticism you try to fly over their heads, if by experience you endeavour to creep beneath, powerful talons await you at your exit. The wise man passes for a magician, the enlightened man for a heretic. The Waldenses, the Cathari, the disciples of John of Parma, were burned; Roger Bacon died only just in time, otherwise he might have been burned. Under this constraint men ceased to think; for he who speaks of thought, speaks of an effort at invention, an individual creation, an energetic action. They recite a lesson, or sing a catechism; even in paradise, even in ecstasy and the divinest raptures of love, Dante thinks himself bound to show an exact memory and a scholastic orthodoxy. How then with the rest? Some, like Raymond Lully, set about inventing an instrument of reasoning to serve in place of the understanding. About the fourteenth century, under the blows of Occam, this verbal science began to totter; they saw that it had no other substance but one of words; it was discredited. In 1367, at Oxford, of thirty thousand students, there remained six thousand; they still set their Barbara and Felapton, but only in the way of routine. Each one in turn mechanically traversed the petty region of threadbare cavils, scratched himself in the briars of quibbles, and burdened himself with his bundle of texts; nothing more. The vast body of science which was to have formed and vivified the whole thought of man, was reduced to a text-book.

So, little by little, the conception which fertilised and ruled all others, dried up; the deep spring, whence flowed all poetic streams, was found empty; science furnished nothing more to the world. What further works could the world produce? As Spain, later on, renewing the middle-age, after having shone splendidly and vainly by her chivalry and devotion, by Lope de Vega and Calderon, Loyola and St. Theresa, became enervated through the Inquisition and through casuistry, and ended by sinking into a brutish silence; so the middle-age, outstripping Spain, after displaying the senseless heroism of the crusades, and the poetical ecstasy of the cloister, after producing chivalry and saintship, Francis of Assisi, St. Louis, and Dante, languished under the Inquisition and the scholastic learning, and became extinguished in idle raving and inanity.

Must we quote all these good people who speak without having anything to say? You may find them in Warton;[1] dozens of translators, importing the poverties of French literature, and imitating imitations; rhyming chroniclers, most commonplace of men, whom we only read because we must accept history from every quarter,

[1] *Hist. of English Poetry*, vol. ii.

even from imbeciles; spinners and spinsters of didactic stories, who pile up verses on the training of falcons, on armour, on chemistry; editors of moralities, who invent the same dream over again for the hundredth time, and get themselves taught universal history by the goddess Sapience. Like the writers of the Latin decadence, these folk only think of copying, compiling, abridging, constructing text-books, in rhymed memoranda, the encyclopedia of their times.

Will you hear the most illustrious, the grave Gower — 'morall Gower,' as he was called?[1] Doubtless here and there he contains a remnant of brilliancy and grace. He is like an old secretary of a Court of Love, André le Chapelain or any other, who would pass the day in solemnly registering the sentences of ladies, and in the evening, partly asleep on his desk, would see in a half-dream their sweet smile and their beautiful eyes.[2] The ingenious but exhausted vein of Charles of Orléans still flows in his French ballads. He has the same fine delicacy, almost a little finicky. The poor little poetic spring flows yet in thin transparent films under the smooth pebbles, and murmurs with a babble, pretty, but so weak that at times you cannot hear it. But dull is the rest! His great poem, *Confessio Amantis*, is a dialogue between a lover and his confessor, imitated chiefly from Jean de Meung, having for object, like the *Roman de la Rose*, to explain and classify the impediments of love. The superannuated theme is always reappearing, and beneath it an indigested erudition. You will find here an exposition of hermetic science, a treatise on the philosophy of Aristotle, a discourse on politics, a litany of ancient and modern legends gleaned from the compilers, marred in the passage by the pedantry of the schools and the ignorance of the age. It is a cart-load of scholastic rubbish; the sewer tumbles upon this feeble spirit, which of itself was flowing clearly, but now, obstructed by tiles, bricks, plaster, ruins from all quarters of the globe, drags on darkened and slackened. Gower, one of the most learned of his time,[3] supposed that Latin was invented by the old prophetess Carmens; that the grammarians, Aristarchus, Donatus, and Didymus, regulated its syntax, pronunciation, and prosody; that it was adorned by Cicero with the flowers of eloquence and rhetoric; then enriched by translations from the Arabic, Chaldæan, and Greek; and that at last, after much labour of celebrated writers, it attained its final perfection in Ovid, the poet of love. Elsewhere he discovers that Ulysses learned rhetoric from Cicero, magic from Zoroaster, astronomy from Ptolemy, and philosophy from Plato. And what a style! so long, so dull,[4] so

[1] Contemporary with Chaucer. The *Confessio Amantis* dates from 1393.

[2] *History of Rosiphele. Ballads.*

[3] Warton, ii. 240.

[4] See, for instance, his description of the sun's crown, the most poetical passage in book vii.

drawn out by repetitions, the most minute details, garnished with references to his text, like a man who, with his eyes glued to his Aristotle and his Ovid, a slave of his musty parchments, can do nothing but copy and string his rhymes together. Scholars even in old age, they seem to believe that every truth, all wit, is in their great wood-bound books; that they have no need to find out and invent for themselves; that their whole business is to repeat; that this is, in fact, man's business. The scholastic system had enthroned the dead letter, and peopled the world with dead understandings.

After Gower come Occleve and Lydgate.[1] 'My father Chaucer would willingly have taught me,' says Occleve, 'but I was dull, and learned little or nothing.' He paraphrased in verse a treatise of Egidius, on government; these are moralities. There are others, on compassion, after Augustine, and on the art of dying; then love-tales; a letter from Cupid, dated from his court in the month of May. Love and moralities,[2] that is, abstractions and refinements, were the taste of the time; and so, in the time of Lebrun, of Esménard, at the close of contemporaneous French literature,[3] they produced collections of didactic poems, and odes to Chloris. As for the monk Lydgate, he had some talent, some imagination, especially in high-toned descriptions: it was the last flicker of a dying literature; gold received a golden coating, precious stones were placed upon diamonds, ornaments multiplied and made fantastic; as in their dress and buildings, so in their style.[4] Look at the costumes of Henry IV. and Henry V., monstrous heart-shaped or horn-shaped head-dresses, long sleeves covered with ridiculous designs, the plumes, and again the oratories, armorial tombs, little gaudy chapels, like conspicuous flowers under the naves of the Gothic perpendicular. When we can no more speak to the soul, we try to speak to the eyes. This is what Lydgate does, nothing more. Pageants or shows are required of him, 'disguisings' for the Company of goldsmiths; a mask before the king, a May-entertainment for the sheriffs of London, a drama of the creation for the festival of Corpus Christi, a masquerade, a Christmas show; he gives the plan and furnishes the verses. In this matter he never runs dry; two hundred and fifty-one poems are attributed to him. Poetry thus conceived becomes a manufacture; it is composed by the yard. Such was the judgment of the Abbot of St. Albans, who, having got him to translate a legend in verse, pays a hundred shillings for the whole, verse, writing, and illuminations, placing the three works on a level.

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1 1420, 1430.

2 This is the title Froissart (1397) gave to his collection when presenting it to Richard II.

3 Lebrun, 1729–1807; Esménard, 1770–1812.

4 Lydgate, *The Destruction of Troy*—description of Hector's chapel. Especially read the *Pageants* or *Solemn Entries*.

In fact, no more thought was required for one than for the others. His three great works, *The Fall of Princes*, *The Destruction of Troy*, and *The Siege of Thebes*, are only translations or paraphrases, verbose, erudite, descriptive, a kind of chivalrous processions, coloured for the twentieth time, in the same manner, on the same vellum. The only point which rises above the average, at least in the first poem, is the idea of Fortune,[1] and the violent vicissitudes of human life. If there was a philosophy at this time, this was it. They willingly narrated horrible and tragic histories; gather them from antiquity down to their own day; they were far from the trusting and passionate piety which felt the hand of God in the government of the world; they saw that the world went blundering here and there like a drunken man. A sad and gloomy world, amused by external pleasures, oppressed with a dull misery, which suffered and feared without consolation or hope, isolated between the ancient spirit in which it had no living hope, and the modern spirit whose active science it ignored. Fortune, like a black smoke, hovers over all, and shuts out the sight of heaven. They picture it as follows:—

'Her face semyng cruel and terrible
And by disdaynè menacing of loke, . . .
An hundred handes she had, of eche part . . .
Some of her handès lyft up men alofte,
To hye estate of worldlye dignitè;
Another handè griped ful unsofte,
Which cast another in grete adversite.'[2]

They look upon the great unhappy ones, a captive king, a dethroned queen, assassinated princes, noble cities destroyed,[3] lamentable spectacles as exhibited in Germany and France, and of which there will be plenty in England; and they can only regard them with a harsh resignation. Lydgate ends by reciting a commonplace of mechanical piety, by way of consolation. The reader makes the sign of the cross, yawns, and goes away. In fact, poetry and religion are no longer capable of suggesting a genuine sentiment. Authors copy, and copy again. Hawes[4] copies the *House of Fame* of Chaucer, and a sort of allegorical amorous poem, after the *Roman de la Rose*. Barclay[5] translates the *Mirror of Good Manners* and the *Ship of Fools*. Continually we meet with dull abstractions, used up and barren; it is the scholastic phase of poetry. If anywhere there is an accent of

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[1] See the Vision of Fortune, a gigantic figure. In this painting he shows both feeling and talent.

[2] Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*. Warton, ii. 280.

[3] The War of the Hussites, The Hundred Years' War, and The War of the Roses.

[4] About 1506. *The Temple of Glass*. *Passetyme of Pleasure*.

[5] About 1500.

greater originality, it is in this *Ship of Fools*, and in Lydgate's *Dance of Death*, bitter buffooneries, sad gaieties, which, in the hands of artists and poets, were having their run throughout Europe. They mock at each other, grotesquely and gloomily; poor, dull, and vulgar figures, shut up in a ship, or made to dance on their tomb to the sound of a fiddle, played by a grinning skeleton. At the end of all this mouldy talk, and amid the disgust which they have conceived for each other, a clown, a tavern Triboulet,[1] composer of little jeering and macaronic verses, Skelton[2] makes his appearance, a virulent pamphleteer, who, jumbling together French, English, Latin phrases, with slang, and fashionable words, invented words, intermingled with short rhymes, fabricates a sort of literary mud, with which he bespatters Wolsey and the bishops. Style, metre, rhyme, language, art of every kind, is at an end; beneath the vain parade of official style there is only a heap of rubbish. Yet, as he says,

'Though my rhyme be ragged,
Tattered and gagged,
Rudely rain-beaten,
Rusty, moth-eaten,
Yf ye take welle therewithe,
It hath in it some pithe.'

It is full of political animus, sensual liveliness, English and popular instincts; it lives. It is a coarse life, still elementary, swarming with ignoble vermin, like that which appears in a great decomposing body. It is life, nevertheless, with its two great features which it is destined to display: the hatred of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which is the Reformation; the return to the senses and to natural life, which is the Renaissance.

[1] The court fool in Victor Hugo's drama of *Le Roi s'amuse*.—TR.

[2] Died 1529; Poet Laureate 1489. His *Bouge of Court*, his *Crown of Laurel*, his *Elegy on the Death of the Earl of Northumberland*, are well written, and belong to official poetry.

BOOK II.

THE RENAISSANCE.

CHAPTER I.

The Pagan Renaissance.

1. Manners of the Time.

I. Idea which men had formed of the world, since the dissolution of the old society—How and why human inventiveness reappears—The form of the spirit of the Renaissance—The representation of objects is imitative, characteristic, and complete.

II. Why the ideal changes—Improvement of the state of man in Europe—In England — Peace — Industry — Commerce — Pasturage — Agriculture — Growth of public wealth — Buildings and furniture — The palace, meals and habits—Court pageantries—Celebrations under Elizabeth — Masques under James I.

III. Manners of the people—Pageants—Theatres—Village feasts—Pagan development.

IV. Models—The ancients—Translation and study of classical authors — Sympathy for the manners and mythology of the ancients—The moderns—Taste for Italian writings and ideas—Poetry and painting in Italy were pagan—The ideal is the strong and happy man, limited by the present world.

2. Poetry.

I. The English Renaissance is the Renaissance of the Saxon genius.

II. The forerunners—The Earl of Surrey—His feudal and chivalrous life—His English individual character—His serious and melancholy poems—His conception of intimate love.

III. His style—His masters, Petrarch and Virgil—His progress, power, precocious perfection—Birth of art—Weaknesses, imitation, research—Art incomplete.

IV. Growth and completion of art—*Euphues* and fashion—Style and spirit of the Renaissance—Copiousness and irregularity—How manners, style, and spirit correspond—Sir Philip Sydney—His education, life, character—His learning, gravity, generosity, forcible expression—The *Arcadia*—Exaggeration and mannerism of sentiments and style—*Defence of Poesie*—Eloquence and energy—His sonnets—Wherein the body and the passions of the

Renaissance differ from those of the moderns—Sensual love—Mystical love.

V. Pastoral poetry—The great number of poets—Spirit and force of the poetry—State of mind which produces it—Love of the country—Reappearance of the ancient gods—Enthusiasm for beauty—Picture of ingenuous and happy love—Shakspeare, Jonson, Fletcher, Drayton, Marlowe, Warner, Breton, Lodge, Greene—How the transformation of the people transforms art.

VI. Ideal poetry—Spenser—His life—His character—His platonism—His *Hymns of Love and Beauty*—Copiousness of his imagination—How far it was suited for the epic—Wherein it was allied to the '*faërie*'—His tentatives—*Shepherd's Calendar*—His short poems—His masterpiece—The *Faërie Queene*—His epic is allegorical and yet life-like—It embraces Christian chivalry and the Pagan Olympia—How it combines these.

VII. The *Faërie Queene*—Impossible events—How they appear natural—*Belphœbe* and *Chrysogone*—Fairy and gigantic pictures and landscapes—Why they must be so—The cave of Mammon, and the gardens of Acrasia—How Spenser composes—Wherein the art of the Renaissance is complete.

3. Prose.

I. Limit of the poetry—Changes in society and manners—How the return to nature becomes an appeal to the senses—Corresponding changes in poetry—How agreeableness replaces energy—How prettiness replaces the beautiful—Refinements—Carew, Suckling, Herrick—Affectation—Quarles, Herbert, Babington, Donne, Cowley—Beginning of the classic style, and the drawing-room life.

II. How poetry passed into prose—Connection of science and art—In Italy—In England—How the triumph of nature develops the exercise of the natural reason—Scholars, historians, speakers, compilers, politicians, antiquarians, philosophers, theologians—The abundance of talent, and the rarity of fine works—Superfluousness, punctiliousness, and pedantry of the style—Originality, precision, energy, and richness of the style—How, unlike the classical writers, they represent the individual, not the idea.

III. Robert Burton—His life and character—Vastness and confusion of his acquirements—His subject, the *Anatomy of Melancholy*—Scholastic divisions—Medley of moral and medical science.

IV. Sir Thomas Browne—His talent—His imagination is that of a North-man—*Hydriotaphia, Religio Medici*—His ideas, curiosity, and doubts belong to the age of the Renaissance—*Pseudodoxia*—Effects of this activity and this direction of the public mind.

V. Francis Bacon—His talent—His originality—Concentration and brightness of his style—Comparisons and aphorisms—The *Essays*—His style not argumentative, but intuitive—His practical good sense—Turning-point of his philosophy—The object of science is the amelioration of the condition of man—*New Atlantis*—The idea is in accordance with the state of affairs and the spirit of the times—It completes the Renaissance—It introduces a new method—The *Organum*—Where Bacon stopped—Limits of the spirit of the age—How the conception of the world, which had been poetic, became mechanical—How the Renaissance ended in the establishment of positive science.

1. Manners of the Time.

I.

FOR seventeen centuries a deep and sad thought had weighed upon the spirit of man, first to overwhelm it, then to exalt and to weaken it, never loosing its hold throughout this long space of time. It was the idea of the impotence and decadence of man. Greek corruption, Roman oppression, and the dissolution of the old world, had given it birth; it, in its turn, had produced a stoical resignation, an epicurean indifference, Alexandrian mysticism, and the Christian hope in the kingdom of God. 'The world is evil and lost, let us escape by insensibility, amazement, ecstasy.' Thus spoke the philosophers; and religion, coming after, announced that the end was near: 'Prepare, for the kingdom of God is at hand.' For a thousand years universal ruin incessantly drove still deeper into their hearts this gloomy thought; and when man in the feudal state raised himself, by sheer force of courage and arms, from the depths of final imbecility and general misery, he discovered his thought and his work fettered by the crushing idea, which, forbidding a life of nature and worldly hopes, erected into ideals the obedience of the monk and the dreams of fanatics.

It degenerated of itself. For the natural result of such a conception, as of the miseries which engender it, and the discouragement which it gives rises to, is to paralyse personal action, and to replace originality by submission. From the fourth century, gradually the dead letter was substituted for the living faith. Christians resigned themselves into the hands of the clergy, they into the hands of the Pope. Christian opinions were subordinated to theologians, and theologians to the Fathers. Christian faith was reduced to the accomplishment of works, and works to the accomplishment of ceremonies. Religion flowing during the first centuries, had become hardened and crystallised, and the coarse contact of the barbarians placed on it, in addition, a layer of idolatry: theocracy and the Inquisition manifested themselves, the monopoly of the clergy and the prohibition of the Scriptures, the worship of relics and the purchase of indulgences. In place of Christianity, the church; in place of free belief, an imposed orthodoxy; in place of moral fervour, determined religious practices; in place of heart and energetic thought, external and mechanical discipline: these are the characteristics of the middle-age. Under this constraint a thinking society had ceased to think; philosophy was turned into a text-book, and poetry into raving; and mankind, slothful and crouching, made over their conscience and their conduct into the hands of their priests, and were as puppets, capable only of reciting a catechism and chanting a hymn.[1]

[1] See, at Bruges, the pictures of Hemling (fifteenth century). No painting enables us to understand so well the ecclesiastical piety of the middle-age, which was altogether like that of the Buddhists.

At last invention makes another start; and it makes it by the efforts of the lay society, which rejected theocracy, kept the State free, and which presently discovered, or re-discovered, one after another, the industries, sciences, and arts. All was renewed; America and the Indies were added to the map; the shape of the earth was ascertained, the system of the universe propounded, modern philology was inaugurated, the experimental sciences set on foot, art and literature shot forth like a harvest, religion was transformed: there was no province of human intelligence and action which was not refreshed and fertilised by this universal effort. It was so great, that it passed from the innovators to the laggards, and reformed Catholicism in the face of Protestantism which it formed. It seems as though men had suddenly opened their eyes, and seen. In fact, they attain a new and superior kind of intelligence. It is the proper feature of this age, that men no longer make themselves masters of objects by bits, or isolated, or through scholastic or mechanical classifications, but as a whole, in general and complete views, with the eager grasp of a sympathetic spirit, which, being placed before a vast object, penetrates it in all its parts, tries it in all its relations, appropriates and assimilates it, impresses upon himself its living and potent image, so life-like and so powerful, that he is fain to translate it into externals through a work of art or an action. An extraordinary warmth of soul, a superabundant and splendid imagination, reveries, visions, artists, believers, founders, creators,—that is what such a form of intellect produces; for to create we must have, as had Luther and Loyola, Michael Angelo and Shakspeare,[1] an idea, not abstract, partial, and dry, but well defined, finished, sensible,—a true creation, which acts inwardly, and struggles to appear to the light. This was Europe's grand age, and the most notable epoch of human growth. To this day we live from its sap, we only carry on its pressure and efforts.

II.

When human power is manifested so clearly and in such great works, it is no wonder if the ideal changes, and the old pagan idea recurs. It recurs, bringing with it the worship of beauty and vigour, first in Italy; for this, of all countries in Europe, is the most pagan, the nearest to the ancient civilisation; thence in France and Spain, in Flanders, even in Germany; and finally in England. How is it propagated? What revolution of manners reunited mankind at this time, in every country, under a sentiment which they had forgotten for fifteen hundred years? Merely that their condition had improved, and they felt it. The idea ever expresses the actual situation, and the creatures of the imagination, like the conceptions of the spirit, only manifest the state of society and the degree of its welfare; there is a

[1] Van Orley, Michel Coxie, Franz Floris, the de Vos', the Sadlers, Crispin de Pass, and the artists of Nuremberg.

fixed connection between what man admires and what he is. While misery overwhelms him, while the decadence is visible, and hope shut out, he is inclined to curse his life on earth, and seek consolation in another sphere. As soon as his sufferings are alleviated, his power made manifest, his perspective enlarged, he begins once more to love the present life, to be self-confident, to love and praise energy, genius, all the effective faculties which labour to procure him happiness. About the twentieth year of Elizabeth's reign, the nobles gave up shield and two-handed sword for the rapier;[1] a little, almost imperceptible fact, yet vast, for it is like the change which, sixty years ago, made us give up the sword at court, to leave us with our arms swinging about in our black coats. In fact, it was the close of feudal life, and the beginning of court-life, just as to-day court-life is at an end, and the democratic reign has begun. With the two-handed swords, heavy coats of mail, feudal dungeons, private warfare, permanent disorder, all the scourges of the middle-age retired, and were wiped out in the past. The English had finished with the Wars of the Roses. They no longer ran the risk of being pillaged to-morrow for being rich, and hung the next day for being a traitor; they have no further need to furbish up their armour, make alliances with powerful nations, lay in stores for the winter, gather together men-at-arms, scour the country, to plunder and hang others.[2] The monarchy, in England as throughout Europe, established peace in the community,[3] and with peace appeared the useful arts. Domestic comfort follows civil security; and man, better furnished in his home, better protected in his hamlet, takes pleasure in his life on earth, which he has changed, and means to change.

Toward the close of the fifteenth century[4] the impetus was given; commerce and the woollen trade made a sudden advance, and such an enormous one that corn-fields were changed into pasture-lands, 'whereby the inhabitants of the said town (Manchester) have gotten and come into riches and wealthy livings,'[5] so that in 1553, 40,000 pieces of cloth were exported in English ships. It was already the England which we see to-day, a land of meadows, green, intersected by hedgerows, crowded with cattle, abounding in ships, a manufacturing opulent land, with a people of beef-eating toilers, who enrich it while they

[1] The first carriage was in 1564. It caused much astonishment. Some said that it was 'a great sea-shell brought from China;' others, 'that it was a temple in which cannibals worshipped the devil.'

[2] For a picture of this state of things, see Fen's *Paston Letters*.

[3] Louis XI. in France, Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, Henry VII. in England. In Italy the feudal regime ended earlier, by the establishment of republics and principalities.

[4] 1488, Act of Parliament on Enclosures.

[5] *A Compendious Examination*, 1581, by William Strafford. Act of Parliament, 1541.

enrich themselves. They improved agriculture to such an extent, that in half a century[1] the produce of an acre was doubled.[2] They grew so rich, that at the beginning of the reign of Charles I. the Commons represented three times the wealth of the Upper House. The ruin of Antwerp[3] by the Duke of Parma sent to England 'the third part of the merchants and manufacturers, who made silk, damask, stockings, taffetas, and serges.' The defeat of the Armada and the decadence of Spain opened the seas to their merchants.[4] The toiling hive, who would dare, attempt, explore, act in unison, and always with profit, was about to reap its advantages and set out on its voyages, buzzing over the universe.

At the base and on the summit of society, in all ranks of life, in all grades of human condition, this new welfare became visible. In 1534, considering that the streets of London were 'very noyous and foul, and in many places thereof very jeopardous to all people passing and repassing, as well on horseback as on foot,' Henry VIII. began the paving of the city.[5] New streets covered the open spaces where the young men used to run and fight. Every year the number of taverns, theatres, rooms for recreation, places devoted to bear-baiting, increased. Before the time of Elizabeth the country-houses of gentlemen were little more than straw-thatched cottages, plastered with the coarsest clay, lighted only by trellises. 'Howbeit,' says Harrison (1580), 'such as be latelie builded are commonlie either of bricke or hard stone, or both; their roomes large and comelie, and houses of office further distant from their lodgings.' The old wooden houses were covered with plaster, 'which, beside the delectable whitenesse of the stuffe itselfe, is laied on so even and smoothlie, as nothing in my judgment can be done with more exactnesse.'[6] This open admiration shows from what hovels they had escaped. Glass was at last employed for windows, and the bare walls were covered with tapestries, on which visitors might see, with delight and astonishment, plants, animals, figures. They began to use stoves, and experienced the unwonted pleasure of being warm. Harrison notes three important changes which had taken place in the farm-houses of his time:—

'One is, the multitude of chimnies lately erected, whereas in their yoong daies

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[1] *Pict. History*, ii. 902.

[2] Between 1377 and 1583 the increase was two millions and a half.

[3] In 1585; Ludovic Guicciardini.

[4] Henry VIII. at the beginning of his reign had but one ship of war. Elizabeth sent out one hundred and fifty against the Armada. In 1553 was founded a company to trade with Russia. In 1578 Drake circumnavigated the globe. In 1600 the East India Company was founded.

[5] *Pict. Hist.* ii. 781.

[6] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, 1817, i. v. 72 *et passim.*

there were not above two or three, if so manie, in most uplandishe townes of the realme. . . . The second is the great amendment of lodging, although not generall, for our fathers, (yea and we ourselves also) have lien full oft upon straw pallets, on rough mats covered onelie with a sheet, under coverlets made of dagswain, or hop-harlots, and a good round log under their heads, insteed of a bolster or pillow. If it were so that the good man of the house, had within seven yeares after his marriage purchased a matteres or flockebed, and thereto a sacke of chaffe to rest his head upon, he thought himselfe to be as well lodged as the lord of the towne. . . . Pillowes (said they) were thought meet onelie for women in childbed. . . . The third thing is the exchange of vessell, as of treene platters into pewter, and wodden spoones into silver or tin; for so common was all sorts of treene stuff in old time, that a man should hardlie find four peeces of pewter (of which one was peradventure a salt) in a good farmers house.'[1]

It is not possession, but acquisition, which gives men pleasure and sense of power; they observe sooner a small happiness, new to them, than a great happiness which is old. It is not when all is good, but when all is better, that they see the bright side of life, and are tempted to make a holiday of it. This is why at this period they did make a holiday of it, a splendid show, so like a picture that it fostered painting in Italy, so like a representation, that it produced the drama in England. Now that the battle-axe and sword of the civil wars had beaten down the independent nobility, and the abolition of the law of maintenance had destroyed the petty royalty of each great feudal baron, the lords quitted their sombre castles, battlemented fortresses, surrounded by stagnant water, pierced with narrow windows, a sort of stone breastplates of no use but to preserve the life of their masters. They flock into new palaces, with vaulted roofs and turrets, covered with fantastic and manifold ornaments, adorned with terraces and vast staircases, with gardens, fountains, statues, such as were the palaces of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, half Gothic and half Italian,[2] whose convenience, grandeur, and beauty announced already habits of society and the taste for pleasure. They came to court and abandoned their old manners; the four meals which scarcely sufficed their former voracity were reduced to two; gentlemen soon became refined, placing their glory in the elegance and singularity of their amusements and their clothes. They dressed magnificently in splendid materials, with the luxury of men who rustle silk and make gold sparkle for the first time: doublets of scarlet satin; cloaks of sable costing a thousand ducats; velvet shoes, embroidered with gold and silver, covered with rosettes and ribbons; boots with falling tops, from whence hung a cloud of lace, embroidered with figures of birds, animals, constellations, flowers in silver, gold, or precious stones; ornamented shirts costing ten pounds. 'It is a common thing to put a thousand goats and a hundred oxen on a coat, and to carry a

[1] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, i. v. 102.

[2] This was called the Tudor style. Under James I., in the hands of Inigo Jones, it became entirely Italian, approaching the antique.

whole manor on one's back.'[1] The costumes of the time were like shrines. When Elizabeth died, they found three thousand dresses in her wardrobe. Need we speak of the monstrous ruffs of the ladies, their puffed out dresses, their stomachers stiff with diamonds? As a singular sign of the times, the men were more changeable and more bedecked than they. Harrison says:

'Such is our mutabilitie, that to daie there is none to the Spanish guise, to morrow the French toies are most fine and delectable, yer long no such apparell as that which is after the high Alman fashion, by and by the Turkish maner is generallie best liked of, otherwise the Morisco gowns, the Barbarian sleeves . . . and the short French breeches. . . . And as these fashions are diverse, so likewise it is a world to see the costlinesse and the curiositie; the excesse and the vanitie; the pompe and the braverie; the change and the varietie; and finallie, the ficklenesse and the follie that is in all degrees.'[2]

Folly, it may have been, but poetry likewise. There was something more than puppyism in this masquerade of splendid costume. The overflow of inner sentiment found this issue, as also in drama and poetry. It was an artistic spirit which induced it. There was an incredible outgrowth of living forms from their brains. They acted like their engravers, who give us in their frontispieces a prodigality of fruits, flowers, active figures, animals, gods, and pour out and confuse the whole treasure of nature in every corner of their paper. They must enjoy the beautiful; they would be happy through their eyes; they perceive in consequence naturally the relief and energy of forms. From the accession of Henry VIII. to the death of James I. we find nothing but tournaments, processions, public entries, masquerades. First come the royal banquets, coronation displays, large and noisy pleasures of Henry VIII. Wolsey entertains him

'In so gorgeous a sort and costlie maner, that it was an heaven to behold. There wanted no dames or damosels meet or apt to danse with the maskers, or to garnish the place for the time: then was there all kind of musike and harmonie, with fine voices both of men and children. On a time the king came suddenlie thither in a maske with a dozen maskers all in garments like sheepheards, made of fine cloth of gold, and crimosin sattin paned, . . . having sixteene torch-bearers. . . . In came a new banket before the king wherein were served two hundred diverse dishes, of costlie devises and subtilities. Thus passed they foorth the night with banketting, dansing, and other triumphs, to the great comfort of the king, and pleasant regard of the nobilitie there assembled.'[3]

Count, if you can,[4] the mythological entertainments, the theatrical re-

[1] Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 12th ed. 1821. Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, ed. Turnbull, 1836.

[2] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, ii. 6, 87.

[3] Holinshed (1586), 1808, 6 vols. iii. 763 *et passim*.

[4] Holinshed, iii., *Reign of Henry VIII.* *Elizabeth and James Progresses*, by Nichols.

ceptions, the open-air operas played before Elizabeth, James, and their great lords. At Kenilworth the pageants lasted ten days. There was everything; learned recreations, novelties, popular plays, sanguinary spectacles, coarse farces, juggling and feats of skill, allegories, mythologies, chivalric exhibitions, rustic and national commemorations. At the same time, in this universal outburst and sudden expanse, men become interested in themselves, find their life desirable, worthy of being represented and put on the stage complete; they play with it, delight in looking upon it, love its heights and depths, and make of it a work of art. The queen is received by a sibyl, then by giants of the time of Arthur, then by the Lady of the Lake, Sylvanus, Pomona, Ceres, and Bacchus, every divinity in turn presents her with the first fruits of his empire. Next day, a savage, dressed in moss and ivy, discourses before her with Echo in her praise. Thirteen bears are set fighting against dogs. An Italian acrobat performs wonderful feats before the whole assembly. A rustic marriage takes place before the queen, then a sort of comic fight amongst the peasants of Coventry, who represent the defeat of the Danes. As she is returning from the chase, Triton, rising from the lake, prays her, in the name of Neptune, to deliver the enchanted lady, pursued by ruthless Sir Bruce. Presently the lady appears, surrounded by nymphs, followed close by Proteus, who is borne by an enormous dolphin. Concealed in the dolphin, a band of musicians with a chorus of ocean-deities, sing the praise of the powerful, beautiful, chaste queen of England. You perceive that comedy is not confined to the theatre; the great of the realm and the queen herself become actors. The cravings of the imagination are so keen, that the court becomes a stage. Under James I., every year, on Twelfth-day, the queen, the chief ladies and nobles, played a piece called a Masque, a sort of allegory combined with dances, heightened in effect by decorations and costumes of great splendour, of which the mythological paintings of Rubens can alone give an idea:—

'The attire of the lords was from the antique Greek statues. On their heads they wore Persic crowns, that were with scrolls of gold plate turned outward, and wreathed about with a carnation and silver net-lawn. Their bodies were of carnation cloth of silver; to express the naked, in manner of the Greek thorax, girt under the breasts with a broad belt of cloth of gold, fastened with jewels; the mantles were of coloured silks; the first, sky-colour; the second, pearl-colour; the third, flame-colour; the fourth, tawny. The ladies attire was of white cloth of silver, wrought with Juno's birds and fruits; a loose under garment, full gathered, of carnation, striped with silver, and parted with a golden zone; beneath that, another flowing garment, of watchet cloth of silver, laced with gold; their hair carelessly bound under the circle of a rare and rich coronet, adorned with all variety, and choice of jewels; from the top of which flowed a transparent veil, down to the ground. Their shoes were azure and gold, set with rubies and diamonds.'[1]

I abridge the description, which is like a fairy tale. Fancy that all

[1] Ben Jonson's works, ed. Gifford, 1816, 9 vols. *Masque of Hymen*, vol. vii. 76.

these costumes, this glitter of materials, this sparkling of diamonds, this splendour of nudities, was displayed daily at the marriage of the great, to the bold sounds of a pagan epithalamium. Think of the feasts which the Earl of Carlisle introduced, where was served first of all a table loaded with sumptuous viands, as high as a man could reach, in order to remove it presently, and replace it by another similar table. This prodigality of magnificence, these costly follies, this unbridling of the imagination, this intoxication of eye and ear, this comedy played by the lords of the realm, showed, like the pictures of Rubens, Jordaens, and their Flemish contemporaries, so open an appeal to the senses, so complete a return to nature, that our chilled and gloomy age is scarcely able to imagine it.[1]

III.

To vent the feelings, to satisfy the heart and eyes, to set free boldly on all the roads of existence the pack of appetites and instincts, this was the craving which the manners of the time betrayed. It was 'merry England,' as they called it then. It was not yet stern and constrained. It expanded widely, freely, and rejoiced to find itself so expanded. No longer at court only was the drama found, but in the village. Strolling companies betook themselves thither, and the country folk supplied any deficiencies, when necessary. Shakspeare saw, before he depicted them, stupid fellows, carpenters, joiners, bellow-menders, play Pyramus and Thisbe,[2] represent the lion roaring as gently as possible, and the wall, by stretching out their hands. Every holiday was a pageant, in which townspeople, workmen, and children bore their parts. They were actors by nature. When the soul is full and fresh, it does not express its ideas by reasonings; it plays and figures them; it mimics them; that is the true and original language, the children's tongue, the speech of artists, of invention, and of joy. It is in this manner they please themselves with songs and feasting, on all the symbolic holidays with which tradition has filled the year.[3] On the Sunday after Twelfth-night the labourers parade the streets, with their shirts over their coats, decked with ribbons, dragging a plough to the sound of music, and dancing a sword-dance; on another day they draw in a cart a figure made of ears of corn, with songs, flutes, and drums; on another, Father Christmas and his company; or else they enact the history of Robin Hood, the bold poacher, around the May-pole, or the legend of Saint George and the Dragon. We might occupy half a volume in describing all these holidays, such as Harvest Home, All Saints, Martinmas, Sheepshearing,

[1] Certain private letters also describe the court of Elizabeth as a place where there was little piety or practice of religion, and where all enormities reigned in the highest degree.

[2] *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

[3] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, chap. v. and vi.

above all Christmas, which lasted twelve days, and sometimes six weeks. They eat and drink, junket, tumble about, kiss the girls, ring the bells, satiate themselves with noise: coarse drunken revels, in which man is an unbridled animal, and which are the incarnation of natural life. The Puritans made no mistake about that. Stubbes says:

'First, all the wilde heades of the parishe, conventying together, chuse them a ground capitaine of mischeef, whan they innoble with the title of my Lorde of Misserule, and hym they crown with great solemnitie, and adopt for their kyng. This kyng anoynted, chuseth for the twentie, fourtie, three score, or a hundred lustie guttes like to hymself to waite uppon his lordely maiestie. . . . Then have they their hobbie horses, dragons, and other antiques, together with their baudie pipers and thunderyng drommers, to strike up the devilles daunce withall; then marche these heathen companie towardes the churche and churche-yarde, their pipers pipyng, their drommers thonderyng, their stumppes dauncyng, their belles rynglyng, their handkerchefes swyngyng about their heades like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters skirmishyng amongest the throng; and in this sorte they goe to the churche (though the minister bee at praier or preachyng), dauncyng, and swingyng their handkercheefes over their heades, in the churche, like devilles incarnate, with such a confused noise, that no man can heare his owne voice. Then the foolishe people they looke, they stare, they laugh, they fleere, and mount upon formes and pewes, to see these goodly pageauntes, solemnized in this sort. Then after this, aboute the churche they goe againe and againe, and so forthe into the churche-yarde, where they have commonly their sommer haules, their bowers, arbours, and banquettyng houses set up, wherein they feaste, banquet, and daunce all that daie, and peradventure all that night too. And thus these terrestrial furies spend the Sabbaoth daie! . . . An other sorte of fantasticall fooles bringe to these helhoundes (the Lorde of Misrule and his complices) some bread, some good ale, some newe cheese, some olde cheese, some custardes, some cakes, some flaunes, some tartes, some creame, some meate, some one thing, some an other.'

He continues thus:

'Against Maie, every parishe, towne and village assemble themselves together, bothe men, women, and children, olde and yong, even all indifferently; they goe to the woodes where they spende all the night in pleasant pastymes, and in the mornyng they returne, bringing with them birch, bowes, and branches of trees, to deck their assemblies withall. But their cheefest iewell they bringe from thence is their Maie poole, whiche they bring home with great veneration, as thus: They have twenty or fourtie yoke of oxen, every ox havyng a sweete nosegaie of flowers tyed on the tippe of his hornes, and these oxen drawe home this Maie poole (this stinckyng idoll rather) . . . and thus beyng reared up, they strawe the grounde aboute, binde greene boughes about it, sett up sommer haules, bowers, and arbours hard by it; and then fall they to banquet and feast, to leape and daunce aboute it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idolles. . . . Of a hundred maides goyng to the woode over night, there have scarcely the third parte returned home againe undefiled.'[1]

'On Shrove Tuesday,' says another,[2] 'at the sound of a bell, the

[1] Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, p. 168 *et passim*.

[2] Hentzner's *Travels in England* (Bentley's translation). He thought that the figure carried about in the Harvest Home represented Ceres.

folk become insane, thousands at a time, and forget all decency and common sense. . . . It is to Satan and the devil that they pay homage and do sacrifice in these abominable pleasures.' It is in fact to nature, to the ancient Pan, to Freya, to Hertha, her sisters, to the old Teutonic deities who survived the middle-age. At this period, in the temporary decay of Christianity, and the sudden advance of corporal well-being, man adored himself, and there endured no life within him but that of paganism.

IV.

To sum up, observe the process of ideas at this time. A few sectarians, chiefly in the towns and of the people, clung gloomily to the Bible. But the court and the men of the world sought their teachers and their heroes from pagan Greece and Rome. About 1490[1] they began to read the classics; one after the other they translated them; it was soon the fashion to read them in the original. Elizabeth, Jane Grey, the Duchess of Norfolk, the Countess of Arundel, many other ladies, were conversant with Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero in the original, and appreciated them. Gradually, by an insensible change, men were raised to the level of the great and healthy minds who had freely handled ideas of all kinds fifteen centuries ago. They comprehended not only their language, but their thought; they did not repeat lessons from, but held conversations with them; they were their equals, and found in them intellects as manly as their own. For they were not scholastic cavillers, miserable compilers, repulsive pedants, like the professors of jargon whom the middle-age had set over them, like gloomy Duns Scotus, whose leaves Henry VIII.'s Visitors scattered to the winds. They were gentlemen, statesmen, the most polished and best educated men in the world, who knew how to speak, and drew their ideas not from books, but from things, living ideas, and which entered of themselves into living souls. Across the train of hooded schoolmen and sordid cavillers the two adult and thinking ages were united, and the moderns, silencing the infantine or snuffling voices of the middle-age, condescended only to converse with the noble ancients. They accepted their gods, at least they understand them, and keep them by their side. In poems, festivals, tapestries, almost all ceremonies, they appear, not restored by pedantry merely, but kept alive by sympathy, and glorified by the arts of an age as flourishing and almost as profound as that of their earliest birth. After the terrible night of the middle-age, and the dolorous legends of spirits and the damned, it was a delight to see again Olympus shining upon us from Greece; its heroic and beautiful deities once more ravishing the heart of men; they raised and in-

[1] Warton, vol. ii. sect. 35. Before 1600 all the great poets were translated into English, and between 1550 and 1616 all the great historians of Greece and Rome. Lyly in 1500 first taught Greek in public.

structed this young world by speaking to it the language of passion and genius; and the age of strong deeds, free sensuality, bold invention, had only to follow its own bent, in order to discover in them the eternal promoters of liberty and beauty.

Nearer still was another paganism, that of Italy; the more seductive because more modern, and because it circulates fresh sap in an ancient stock; the more attractive, because more sensuous and present, with its worship of force and genius, of pleasure and voluptuousness. The rigorists knew this well, and were shocked at it. Ascham writes:

'These bee the inchantementes of Circes, brought out of Italie to marre mens maners in England; much, by example of ill life, but more by preceptes of fonde bookes, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London. . . . There bee moe of these ungratious bookes set out in Printe wythin these fewe monethes, than have bene sene in England many score yeares before. . . . Than they have in more reverence the triumphes of Petrarche: than the Genesis of Moses: They make more account of Tullies offices, than S. Paules epistles: of a tale in Bocace than a storie of the Bible.'[1]

In fact, at that time Italy clearly led in everything, and civilisation was to be drawn thence, as from its spring. What is this civilisation which is thus imposed on the whole of Europe, whence every science and every elegance comes, whose laws are obeyed in every court, in which Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare sought their models and their materials? It was pagan in its elements and its birth; in its language, which is but slightly different from Latin; in its Latin traditions and recollections, which no gap has come to interrupt; in its constitution, whose old municipal life first led and absorbed the feudal life; in the genius of its race, in which energy and enjoyment always abounded. More than a century before other nations, from the time of Petrarch, Rienzi, Boccacio, the Italians began to recover the lost antiquity, to deliver the manuscripts buried in the dungeons of France and Germany, to restore, interpret, comment upon, study the ancients, to make themselves Latin in heart and mind, to compose in prose and verse with the polish of Cicero and Virgil, to hold spirited converse and intellectual pleasures as the ornament and the fairest flower of life.[2] They adopt not merely the externals of the old existence, but the elements, that is, preoccupation with the present life, forgetfulness of the future, the appeal to the senses, the renunciation of Christianity. 'We must enjoy,' sang their first poet, Lorenzo de Medici, in his pastorals and triumphal songs: 'there is no certainty of to-morrow.' In Pulci the mocking incredulity breaks out, the bold and sensual gaiety, all the audacity of the free-thinkers, who kicked aside in disgust the worn-out

[1] Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570), ed. Arber, 1870, first book, 78 *et passim.*

[2] Ma il vero e principal ornemento dell' animo in ciascuno penso io che siano le lettere, benchè i Franchesi solamente conoscano la nobilità dell'arme . . . et tutti i litterati tengon per vilissimi huomini. Castiglione, *il Cortegiano*, ed. 1585, p. 112.

monkish frock of the middle-age. It was he who, in a jesting poem, puts at the beginning of each canto a Hosanna, an In principio, or a sacred text from the mass-book.[1] When he had been inquiring what the soul was, and how it entered the body, he compared it to jam covered up in white bread quite hot. What would become of it in the other world? 'Some people think they will there discover fig-peckers, plucked ortolans, excellent wine, good beds, and therefore they follow the monks, walking behind them. As for us, dear friend, we shall go into the black valley, where we shall hear no more Alleluias.' If you wish for a more serious thinker, listen to the great patriot, the Thucydides of the age, Machiavelli, who, contrasting Christianity and paganism, says that the first places 'supreme happiness in humility, abnegation, contempt for human things, while the other makes the sovereign good consist in greatness of soul, force of body, and all the qualities which make men to be feared.' Whereon he boldly concludes that Christianity teaches man 'to support evils, and not to do great deeds;' he discovers in that inner weakness the cause of all oppressions; declares that 'the wicked saw that they could tyrannise without fear over men, who, in order to get to paradise, were more disposed to suffer than to avenge injuries.' From this time, and in spite of his constrained genuflexions, you can see which religion he prefers. The ideal to which all efforts were turning, on which all thoughts depended, and which completely raised this civilisation, was the strong and happy man, fortified by all powers to accomplish his wishes, and disposed to use them in pursuit of his happiness.

If you would see this idea in its grandest operation, you must seek it in the arts, such as Italy made them and carried throughout Europe, raising or transforming the national schools with such originality and vigour, that all art likely to survive is derived from hence, and the population of living figures with which they have covered our walls, denotes, like Gothic architecture or French tragedy, a unique epoch of the human intelligence. The attenuated mediæval Christ—a miserable, distorted, and bleeding earth-worm; the pale and ugly Virgin—a poor old peasant woman, fainting beside the gibbet of her Son; ghastly martyrs, dried up with fasts, with entranced eyes; knotty-fingered saints with sunken chests,—all the touching or lamentable visions of the middle-age have vanished: the train of godheads which are now developed show nothing but flourishing frames, noble, regular features, and fine easy gestures; the names, the names only, are Christian. The new Jesus is a 'crucified Jupiter,' as Pulci called him; the Virgins which Raphael designed naked, before covering them with garments,[2] are

[1] See Burchard, the Pope's Steward, account of the festival at which Lucretia Borgia assisted. Letters of Aretinus, *Life of Cellini*, etc.

[2] See his sketches at Oxford, and the sketches of Fra Bartolomeo at Florence. See also the Martyrdom of S. Laurence, by Baccio Bandinelli.

beautiful girls, quite earthly, relatives of the Fornarina. The saints which Michael Angelo arranges and contorts in heaven on the judgment-day are an assembly of athletes, capable of fighting well and daring much. A martyrdom, like that of Saint Laurentius, is a fine ceremony in which a beautiful young man, without clothing, lies amidst fifty men dressed and grouped as in an ancient gymnasium. Is there one of them who had macerated himself? Is there one who had thought with anguish and tears of the judgment of God, who had worn down and subdued his flesh, who had filled his heart with the sadness and sweetness of the gospel? They are too vigorous for that, they are in too robust health; their clothes fit them too closely; they are too ready for prompt and energetic action. We might make of them strong soldiers or proud courtesans, admirable in a pageant or at a ball. So, all that the spectator accords to their halo of glory, is a bow or a sign of the cross; after which his eyes find pleasure in them; they are there simply for the enjoyment of the eyes. What the spectator feels at the sight of a Florentine Madonna, is the splendid Virgin, whose powerful body and fine growth bespeak her race and her vigour; the artist did not paint moral expression as nowadays, the depth of a soul tortured and refined by three centuries of culture. They confine themselves to the body, to the extent even of speaking enthusiastically of the spinal column itself, 'which is magnificent;' of the shoulder-blades, which in the movements of the arm 'produce an admirable effect.' 'You will next design the bone which is situated between the hips. It is very fine, and is called the sacrum.'[1] The important point with them is to represent the nude well. Beauty with them is that of the complete skeleton, sinews which are linked together and tightened, the thighs which support the trunk, the strong chest breathing freely, the pliant neck. What a pleasure to be naked! How good it is in the full light to rejoice in your strong body, your well-formed muscles, your gay and bold soul! The splendid goddesses reappear in their primitive nudity, not dreaming that they are nude; you see from the tranquillity of their look, the simplicity of their expression, that they have always been thus, and that shame has not yet reached them. The soul's life is not here contrasted, as amongst us, with the body's life; the one is not so lowered and degraded, that we dare not show its actions and functions; they do not hide them; man does not dream of being all spirit. They rise, as of old, from the luminous sea, with their rearing steeds tossing up their manes, grinding the bit, inhaling the briny savour, whilst their companions wind the sounding-shell; and the spectators,[2] accustomed to handle the sword, to combat

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1 Benvenuto Cellini, *Principles of the Art of Design.*

2 *Life of Cellini.* Compare also these exercises which Castiglione prescribes for a well-educated man, in his *Cortegiano*, ed. 1585, p. 55:—'Peró voglio che il nostro cortegiano sia perfetto cavaliere d'ogni sella. . . . Et perchè degli Italiani è peculiar laude il cavalcare benè alla brida, il maneggiar con raggione massima-

naked with the dagger or double-handled blade, to ride on perilous roads, sympathise with the proud shape of the bended back, the effort of the arm about to strike, the long quiver of the muscles which, from neck to heel, swell out, to brace a man, or to throw him.

2. Poetry.

I.

Transplanted into different races and climates, this paganism receives from each, distinct features and a distinct character. In England it becomes English; the English Renaissance is the Renaissance of the Saxon genius. Invention recommences; and to invent is to express one's genius. A Latin race can only invent by expressing Latin ideas; a Saxon race by expressing Saxon ideas; and we shall find in the new civilisation and poetry, descendants of Cædmon and Adhelm, of Piers Plowman, and Robin Hood.

II.

Old Puttenham says:

'In the latter end of the same king (Henry the eight) reigne, sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyat th' elder and Henry Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who having travailed into Italie, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie, as novices newly crept out of the schooles of Dante, Arioste, and Petrarch, they greatly pollished our rude and homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile.'[1]

Not that their style was very original, or openly exhibits the new spirit: the middle-age is nearly ended, but it was not yet finished. By their side Andrew Borde, John Bale, John Heywood, Skelton himself, repeat the platitudes of the old poetry and the coarseness of the old style. Their manners, half refined, were still half feudal; on the field, before Landrecies, the English commander wrote a letter to the French governor of Térouanne, to ask him 'if he had not some gentlemen disposed to break a lance in honour of the ladies,' and promised to send six champions to meet them. Parades, combats, wounds, challenges, love, appeals to the judgment of God, penances,—all these were found in the life of Surrey as in a chivalric romance. A great lord, an earl, a relative of the king, who had figured in processions and ceremonies, had made war, commanded fortresses, ravaged countries, mounted to the assault, fallen

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mente cavalli aspri, il corre lance, il giostare, sia in questo de meglior Italiani. . . . Nel torneare, ther un passo, combattere una sbarra, sia buono tra il miglior francesi. . . . Nel giocare a canne, correr torri, lanciar haste e dardi, sia tra Spagnuoli eccellente. . . . Conveniente è ancor sapere saltare, e correre; . . . ancor nobile exercitio il gisco di palla. . . . Non di minor laude estimo il voltegiar a cavallo.'

[1] Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Arber, 1869, book i. ch. 31, p. 74.

in the breach, had been saved by his servant, magnificent, sumptuous, irritable, ambitious, four times imprisoned, finally beheaded. At the coronation of Ann of Cleves he was one of the challengers of the tourney. Denounced and placed in durance, he offered to fight unarmed against an armed adversary. Another time he was put in prison for having eaten flesh in Lent. No wonder if this prolongation of chivalric manners brought with it a prolongation of chivalric poetry; if in an age which had known Petrarch, poets displayed the sentiments of Petrarch. Lord Berners, Lord Sheffield, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Surrey in the first rank, were, like Petrarch, plaintive and platonic lovers. It was pure love to which Surrey gave expression; for his lady, the beautiful Geraldine, like Beatrice and Laura, was an ideal personage, and a child of thirteen years.

And yet, amid this languor of mystical tradition, a personal feeling had sway. In this spirit which imitated, and that badly at times, which still groped for an outlet, and now and then admitted into its polished stanzas the old, simple expressions and stale metaphors of heralds of arms and trouvères, there was already visible the Northern melancholy, the inner and gloomy emotion. This feature, which presently, at the finest moment of its richest blossom, in the splendid expansiveness of natural life, spreads a sombre tint over the poetry of Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare, already in the first poet separates this pagan yet Teutonic world from the other, all in all voluptuous, which in Italy, with lively and refined irony, had no taste, except for art and pleasure. Surrey translated the Ecclesiastes into verse. Is it not singular, at this early hour, in this rising dawn, to find such a book in his hand? A disenchantment, a sad or bitter dreaminess, an innate consciousness of the vanity of human things, are never lacking in this country and in this race; the inhabitants support life with difficulty, and know how to speak of death. Surrey's finest verses bear witness thus soon to his serious bent, this instinctive and grave philosophy. He records his griefs, regretting his beloved Wyatt, his friend Clère, his companion the young Duke of Richmond, all dead in their prime. Alone, a prisoner at Windsor, he recalls the happy days they have passed together:

'So cruel prison how could betide, alas,
As proud Windsor, where I in lust and joy,
With a Kinges son, my childish years did pass,
In greater feast than Priam's son of Troy.

Where each sweet place returns a taste full sour,
The large green courts, where we were wont to hove,
With eyes cast up into the Maiden's tower,
And easy sighs, such as folk draw in love.

The stately seats, the ladies bright of hue,
The dances short, long tales of great delight,
With words and looks, that tigers could but rue;
Where each of us did plead the other's right.

The palme-play, where, despoiled for the game,
With dazed eyes oft we by gleams of love
Have miss'd the ball, and got sight of our dame,
To bait her eyes, which kept the leads above. . . .

The secret thoughts, imparted with such trust;
The wanton talk, the divers change of play;
The friendship sworn, each promise kept so just,
Wherewith we past the winter night away.

And with his thought the blood forsakes the face;
The tears berain my cheeks of deadly hue:
The which, as soon as sobbing sighs, alas!
Up-supped have, thus I my plaint renew:

O place of bliss! renewer of my woes!
Give me account, where is my noble fere?
Whom in thy walls thou dost each night enclose;
To other lief; but unto me most dear.

Echo, alas! that doth my sorrow rue,
Returns thereto a hollow sound of plaint.'[1]

So in love, it is the sinking of a weary soul, to which he gives vent:

'For all things having life, sometime hath quiet rest;
The bearing ass, the drawing ox, and every other beast;
The peasant, and the post, that serves at all assays;
The ship-boy, and the galley-slave, have time to take their ease;
Save I, alas! whom care of force doth so constrain,
To wail the day, and wake the night, continually in pain,
From pensiveness to plaint, from plaint to bitter tears,
From tears to painful plaint again; and thus my life it wears.'[2]

That which brings joy to others brings him grief:

'The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings,
With green hath clad the hill, and eke the vale.
The nightingale with feathers new she sings;
The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.
Summer is come, for every spray now springs;
The hart has hung his old head on the pale;
The buck in brake his winter coat he slings;
The fishes flete with new repaired scale;
The adder all her slough away she slings;
The swift swallow pursueth the flies smale;
The busy bee her honey now she mings;
Winter is worn that was the flowers' bale.
And thus I see among these pleasant things
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs!'[3]

[1] Surrey's *Poems*, Pickering, 1831, p. 17.

[2] *Ibid.* 'The faithful lover declareth his pains and his uncertain joys, and with only hope recomforteth his woful heart,' p. 53.

[3] *Ibid.* 'Description of Spring, wherein every thing renews, save only the lover,' p. 3.

For all that, he will love on to his last sigh.

> 'Yea, rather die a thousand times, than once to false my faith ;
> And if my feeble corpse, through weight of woful smart
> Do fail, or faint, my will it is that still she keep my heart.
> And when this carcass here to earth shall be refar'd,
> I do bequeath my wearied ghost to serve her afterward.'[1]

An infinite love, and pure as Petrarch's; and she is worthy of it. In the midst of all these studied or imitated verses, an admirable portrait remains distinct, the simplest and truest we can imagine, a work of the heart now, and not of the memory, which behind the dame of chivalry shows the English wife, and behind the feudal gallantry domestic bliss. Surrey alone, restless, hears within him the firm tones of a good friend, a sincere counsellor, Hope, who speaks to him thus:

> 'For I assure thee, even by oath,
> And thereon take my hand and troth,
> That she is one the worthiest,
> The truest, and the faithfullest ;
> The gentlest and the meekest of mind
> That here on earth a man may find :
> And if that love and truth were gone,
> In her it might be found alone.
> For in her mind no thought there is,
> But how she may be true, I wis ;
> And tenders thee and all thy heal,
> And wishes both thy health and weal ;
> And loves thee even as far forth than
> As any woman may a man ;
> And is thine own, and so she says ;
> And cares for thee ten thousand ways.
> Of thee she speaks, on thee she thinks ;
> With thee she eats, with thee she drinks ;
> With thee she talks, with thee she moans ;
> With thee she sighs, with thee she groans ;
> With thee she says "Farewell mine own!"
> When thou, God knows, full far art gone.
> And even, to tell thee all aright,
> To thee she says full oft "Good night!"
> And names thee oft her own most dear,
> Her comfort, weal, and all her cheer ;
> And tells her pillow all the tale
> How thou hast done her woe and bale ;
> And how she longs, and plains for thee,
> And says, "Why art thou so from me?"
> Am I not she that loves thee best?
> Do I not wish thine ease and rest?
> Seek I not how I may thee please?
> Why art thou so from thine ease?

[1] Surrey's *Poems*, p. 56.

If I be she for whom thou carest,
For whom in torments so thou farest,
Alas! thou knowest to find me here,
Where I remain thine own most dear,
Thine own most true, thine own most just,
Thine own that loves thee still, and must;
Thine own that cares alone for thee,
As thou, I think, dost care for me;
And even the woman, she alone,
That is full bent to be thine own.'[1]

Certainly it is of his wife[2] that he is thinking here, not of any imaginary Laura. The poetic dream of Petrarch has become the exact picture of deep and perfect conjugal affection, such as yet survives in England; such as all the poets, from the authoress of the *Nut-brown Maid* to Dickens,[3] have never failed to represent.

III.

An English Petrarch: no juster title could be given to Surrey, for it expresses his talent as well as his disposition. In fact, like Petrarch, the oldest of the humanists, and the earliest exact writer of the modern tongue, Surrey introduces a new style, a manly style, which marks a great transformation of the mind; for this new form of writing is the result of a superior reflection, which, governing the primitive impulse, calculates and selects with an end in view. At last the intellect has grown capable of self-criticism, and actually criticises itself. It corrects its unconsidered works, infantine and incoherent, at once incomplete and superabundant; it strengthens and binds them together; it prunes and perfects them; it takes from them the master idea, to set it free and in the light of day. This is what Surrey does, and his education had prepared him for it; for he had studied Virgil as well as Petrarch, and translated two books of the *Æneid*, almost verse for verse. In such company one cannot but select one's ideas and arrange one's phrases. After their example, he gauges the means of striking the attention, assisting the intelligence, avoiding fatigue and weariness. He looks forward to the last line whilst writing the first. He keeps the strongest word for the last, and shows the symmetry of ideas by the symmetry of phrases. Sometimes he guides the intelligence by a continuous series of contrasts to the final image; a kind of sparkling casket, in which he means to deposit the idea which he

[1] *Ibid.* 'A description of the restless state of the lover when absent from the mistress of his heart,' p. 78.

[2] In another piece, *Complaint on the Absence of her Lover being upon the Sea*, he speaks in exact terms of his wife, almost as affectionately.

[3] Greene, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Shakspeare, Ford, Otway, Richardson, De Foe, Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, etc.

carries, and to which he directs our attention from the first.[1] Sometimes he leads his reader to the close of a long flowery description, and then suddenly checks him with a sorrowful phrase.[2] He arranges his process, and knows how to produce effects; he uses classical expressions, in which two substantives, each supported by its adjective, are balanced on either side of the verb.[3] He collects his phrases in harmonious periods, and does not neglect the delight of the ears any more than of the mind. By his inversions he adds force to his ideas, and weight to his argument. He selects elegant or noble terms, rejects idle words and redundant phrases. Every epithet contains an idea, every metaphor a sentiment. There is eloquence in the regular development of his thought; music in the sustained accent of his verse.

Such is the new-born art. Those who have ideas, now possess an instrument capable of expressing them. Like the Italian painters, who in fifty years had introduced or discovered all the technical tricks of the pencil, English writers, in half a century, introduce or discover all the artifices of language, period, style, heroic verse, stanza, so effectually, that a little later the most perfect versifiers, Dryden, and Pope himself, says Dr. Nott, will add scarce anything to the rules, invented or applied, which were employed in the earliest efforts.[4] Even Surrey is too near to these authors, too constrained in his models, not sufficiently free: he has not yet felt the great current of the age; we do not find in him a bold genius, an impassioned writer capable of wide expansion, but a courtier, a lover of elegance, who, penetrated by the beauties of two complete literatures, imitates Horace and the chosen masters of Italy, corrects and polishes little morsels, aims at speaking perfectly a fine language. Amongst semi-barbarians he wears a dress-coat becomingly. Yet he does not wear it completely at his ease: he keeps his eyes too exclusively on his models, and does not venture to permit himself frank and free gestures. He is still a scholar, makes too great use of hot and cold, wounds and martyrdom. Although a lover, and a genuine one, he thinks too much that he must be so in Petrarch's manner, that his phrase must be balanced and his image kept up. I had almost said that, in his sonnets of disappointed love, he thinks less often of the strength of love than of the beauty of his writing. He has conceits, ill-chosen words; he uses trite expressions; he relates how Nature, having formed his lady, broke the mould; he assigns parts to Cupid and Venus; he employs the old machinery of the troubadours and the ancients, like a clever man who wishes to pass for a gallant. Scarce any mind dares be at first quite itself: when a new art arises, the first artist listens not to his heart, but

[1] *The Frailty and Hurtfulness of Beauty.*
[2] *Description of Spring. A Vow to love faithfully.*
[3] *Complaint of the Lover disdained.*
[4] Surrey, ed. Nott.

to his masters, and asks himself at every step whether he be setting foot on solid ground, or whether he is not stumbling.

IV.

Insensibly the growth becomes complete, and at the end of the century all was changed. A new, strange, overloaded style had been formed, destined to remain in force until the Restoration, not only in poetry, but also in prose, even in ceremonial speech and theological discourse,[1] so suitable to the spirit of the age, that we meet with it throughout Europe, in Ronsard and d'Aubigné, in Calderon, Gongora, and Marini. In 1580 appeared *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, by Lyly, which was its text-book, its masterpiece, its caricature, and was received with universal admiration.[2] 'Our nation,' says Edward Blount, 'are in his debt for a new English which hee taught them. All our ladies were then his scollers; and that beautie in court who could not parley Euphuesme was as little regarded as shee which now there speakes not French.' The ladies knew the phrases of *Euphues* by heart: strange, studied, and refined phrases, enigmatical; whose author seems of set purpose to seek the least natural expressions and the most far-fetched, full of exaggeration and antithesis, in which mythological allusions, illustrations from alchemy, botanical and astronomical figures, all the rubbish and medley of learning, travels, mannerism, roll in a flood of conceits and comparisons. Do not judge it by the grotesque picture that Walter Scott drew of it. Sir Piercie Shafton is but a pedant, a cold and dull copyist; it is its warmth and originality which give this style a true force and an accent of its own. You must conceive it, not as dead and inert, such as we have it to-day in old books, but springing from the lips of ladies and young lords in pearl-bedecked doublet, quickened by their vibrating voices, their laughter, the flash of their eyes, the motion of their hands as they played with the hilt of their swords or with their satin cloaks. They were witty, their heads full to overflowing; and they amused themselves, as our sensitive and eager artists do, at their ease in the studio. They did not speak to convince or be understood, but to satisfy their excited imagination, to expend their overflowing wit.[3] They played with words, twisted, put them out of shape, rejoiced in sudden views, strong contrasts, which they produced one after another, ever and anon, in quick succession. They cast flower on flower, tinsel on tinsel; everything sparkling delighted them; they gilded and embroidered and plumed their language like their garments. They cared nothing for clearness, order, common sense; it was a festival and a

[1] The Speaker's address to Charles II. on his restoration. Compare it with the speech of M. de Fontanes under the Empire. In each case it was the close of a literary epoch. Read for illustration the speech before the University of Oxford, *Athenæ Oxonienses*, i. 193.

[2] His second work, *Euphues and his England*, appeared in 1581.

[3] See Shakspeare's young men, Mercutio especially.

folly; absurdity pleased them. They knew nothing more tempting than a carnival of splendours and oddities; all was huddled together: a coarse gaiety, a tender and sad word, a pastoral, a sounding flourish of unmeasured boasting, a gambol of a Jack-pudding. Eyes, ears, all the senses, curious and excited, are satisfied by the jingle of syllables, the display of fine high-coloured words, the unexpected concurrence of droll or familiar images, the majestic roll of balanced periods. Every one had his oaths, his elegances, his style. 'One would say,' remarks Heylyn, 'that they are ashamed of their mother-tongue, and do not find it sufficiently varied to express the whims of their mind.' We no longer imagine this inventiveness, this boldness of fancy, this ceaseless fertility of a nervous sensibility: there was no genuine prose; the poetic flood swallowed it up. A word was not an exact symbol, as with us; a document which from cabinet to cabinet carried a precise thought. It was part of a complete action, a little drama; when they read it, they did not take it by itself, but imagined it with the intonation of a hissing and shrill voice, with the puckering of the lips, the knitting of the brows, and the succession of pictures which crowd behind it, and which it calls forth in a flash of lightning. Each one mimics and pronounces it in his own style, and impresses his own soul upon it. It was a song, which, like the poet's verse, contains a thousand things besides the literal sense, and manifests the depth, warmth, and sparkling of the source whence it came. For in that time, even when the man was feeble, his work lived: there is some pulse in the least productions of this age; force and creative fire signalise it; they penetrate through bombast and affectation. Lyly himself, so fantastic that he seems to write purposely in defiance of common sense, is at times a genuine poet, a singer, a man capable of rapture, akin to Spenser and Shakspeare; one of those introspective dreamers, who see dancing fairies, the purpled cheeks of goddesses, drunken, amorous woods, as he says:

> 'Adorned with the presence of my love,
> The woods I fear such secret power shall prove,
> As they'll shut up each path, hide every way,
> Because they still would have her go astray.'[1]

The reader must assist me, and assist himself. I cannot otherwise give him to understand what the men of this age had the felicity to experience.

Luxuriance and irregularity were the two features of this spirit and this literature,—features common to all the literatures of the Renaissance, but more marked here than elsewhere, because the German race is not confined, like the Latin, by the taste for harmonious forms, and prefers strong impression to fine expression. We must select amidst this crowd of poets; and here is one amongst the first, who will exhibit, by his writings as well as by his life, the greatness and the

[1] *The Maid her Metamorphosis.*

folly of the prevailing manners and the public taste: Sir Philip Sidney, nephew of the Earl of Leicester, a great lord and a man of action, accomplished in every kind of culture; who, after a good training in polite literature, travelled in France, Germany, and Italy; read Plato and Aristotle, studied astronomy and geometry at Venice; pondered over the Greek tragedies, the Italian sonnets, the pastorals of Montemayor, the poems of Ronsard; displaying an interest in science, keeping up an exchange of letters with the learned Hubert Languet; and withal a man of the world, a favourite of Elizabeth, having had enacted in her honour a flattering and comic pastoral; a genuine 'jewel of the Court;' a judge, like d'Urfé, of lofty gallantry and fine language; above all, chivalrous in heart and deed, who had desired to follow maritime adventure with Drake, and, to crown all, fated to die an early and heroic death. He was a cavalry officer, and had saved the English army at Gravelines. Shortly after, mortally wounded, and dying of thirst, as some water was brought to him, he saw by his side a soldier still more desperately hurt, who was looking at the water with anguish in his face: 'Give it to this man,' said he; 'his necessity is yet greater than mine.' Do not forget the vehemence and impetuosity of the middle-age;—one hand ready for action, and kept incessantly on the hilt of the sword or poniard. 'Mr. Molineux,' wrote he to his father's secretary, 'if ever I know you to do as much as read any letter I write to my father, without his commandment or my consent, I will thrust my dagger into you. And trust to it, for I speak in earnest.' It was the same man who said to his uncle's adversaries that they 'lied in their throat;' and to support his words, promised them a meeting in three months in any place in Europe. The savage energy of the preceding age remains intact, and it is for this reason that poetry took so firm a hold on these virgin souls. The human harvest is never so fine as when cultivation opens up a new soil. Impassioned to an extreme, melancholy and solitary, he naturally turned to noble and ardent fantasy; and he was so much the poet, as to be so beyond his verses.

Shall I describe his pastoral epic, the *Arcadia*? It is but a recreation, a sort of poetical romance, written in the country for the amusement of his sister; a work of fashion, which, like *Cyrus* and *Clélie*,[1] is not a monument, but a relic. This kind of books shows only the externals, the current elegance and politeness, the jargon of the world of culture,—in short, that which should be spoken before ladies; and yet we perceive from it the bent of the general spirit. In *Clélie*, oratorical development, fine and collected analysis, the flowing converse of men seated quietly on elegant arm-chairs; in the *Arcadia*, fantastic imagination, excessive sentiments, a medley of events which suited men scarcely recovered from barbarism. Indeed, in London they still

[1] Two French novels of the age of Louis XIV., each in ten volumes, and written by Mademoiselle de Scudéry.—TR.

used to fire pistols at each other in the streets; and under Henry VIII. and his children, queens, a Protector, the highest nobles, knelt under the axe of the executioner. Armed and perilous existence long resisted in Europe the establishment of peaceful and quiet life. It was necessary to change society and the soil, in order to transform men of the sword into citizens. The high roads of Louis XIV. and his regular administration, and more recently the railroads and the *sergents de ville*, came to relieve the French from habits of violence and a taste for dangerous adventure. Remember that at this period men's heads were full of tragical images. Sidney's *Arcadia* contains enough of them to supply half-a-dozen epics. 'It is a trifle,' says the author; 'my young head must be delivered.' In the first twenty-five pages you meet with a shipwreck, an account of pirates, a half-drowned prince rescued by shepherds, a voyage in Arcadia, various disguises, the retreat of a king withdrawn into solitude with his wife and children, the deliverance of a young imprisoned lord, a war against the Helots, the conclusion of peace, and many other things. Go on, and you will find princesses shut up by a wicked fairy, who beats them, and threatens them with death if they refuse to marry her son; a beautiful queen condemned to perish by fire if certain knights do not come to her succour; a treacherous prince tortured for his crimes, then cast from the top of a pyramid; fights, surprises, abductions, travels: in short, the whole programme of the most romantic tales. That is the serious element: the agreeable is of a like nature; the fantastic predominates. Improbable pastoral serves, as in Shakspeare or Lope de Vega, for an intermezzo to improbable tragedy. You are always coming upon dancing shepherds. They are very courteous, good poets, and subtle metaphysicians. There are many disguised princes who pay their court to the princesses. They sing continually, and get up allegorical dances; two bands approach, servants of Reason and Passion; their hats, ribbons, and dress are described in full. They quarrel in verse, and their hurried retorts, which follow close on one another, over-refined, keep up a tournament of wit. Who cared for what was natural or possible in this age? There were such festivals at Elizabeth's entries; and you have only to look at the engravings of Sadler, Martin de Vos, and Goltzius, to find this mixture of sensuous beauties and philosophical enigmas. The Countess of Pembroke and her ladies were delighted to picture this profusion of costumes and verses, this play beneath the trees. They had eyes in the sixteenth century, senses which sought satisfaction in poetry—the same satisfaction as in masquerading and painting. Man was not yet a pure reasoner; abstract truth was not enough for him. Rich stuffs, twisted about and folded; the sun to shine upon them, a large meadow full of white daisies; ladies in brocaded dresses, with bare arms, crowns on their heads, instruments of music behind the trees,—this is what the reader expects; he cares nothing for contrasts; he will readily provide a drawing-room in the midst of the fields.

What are they going to say there? Here comes out that restless exaltation, amidst all its folly, which is characteristic of the spirit of the age; love rises to the thirty-sixth heaven. Musidorus is the brother of Céladon; Pamela is closely related to the severe heroines of *Astrée*;[1] all the Spanish exaggerations abound with all their faults. But in works of fashion or of the Court, primitive sentiment never retains its sincerity: wit, the necessity to please, the desire of effect, of speaking better than others, alter it, force it, confuse the embellishments and refinements, so that nothing is left but twaddle. Musidorus wished to give Pamela a kiss. She repels him. He would have died on the spot; but luckily remembers that his mistress commanded him to leave her, and finds himself still able to obey her command. He complains to the trees, weeps in verse: there are dialogues where Echo, repeating the last word, replies; double rhymes, balanced stanzas, in which the theory of love is minutely detailed; in short, all choice morsels of ornamental poetry. If they send a letter to their mistress, they speak to it, tell the ink:

'Therefore mourne boldly, my inke; for while shee lookes upon you, your blacknesse will shine: cry out boldly my lamentation; for while shee reades you, your cries will be musicke.'[2]

Again, two young princesses are going to bed:

'They impoverished their clothes to enrich their bed, which for that night might well scorne the shrine of Venus; and there cherishing one another with deare, though chaste embracements; with sweete, though cold kisses; it might seeme that love was come to play him there without dart, or that wearie of his owne fires, he was there to refresh himselfe between their sweete breathing lippes.'[3]

In excuse of these follies, remember that they have their parallels in Shakspeare. Try rather to comprehend them, to imagine them in their place, with their surroundings, such as they are; that is, as the excess of singularity and inventive fire. Even though they mar now and then the finest ideas, yet a natural freshness pierces through the disguise. Take another example:

'In the time that the morning did strew roses and violets in the heavenly floore against the coming of the sun, the nightingales (striving one with the other which could in most dainty varietie recount their wronge-caused sorrow) made them put off their sleep.'

In Sidney's second work, *The Defence of Poesie*, we meet with genuine imagination, a sincere and serious tone, a grand, commanding style, all the passion and elevation which he carries in his heart and puts into his verse. He is a muser, a Platonist, who is penetrated by the ancient teaching, who takes things from a high point of view, who places the excellence of poetry not in pleasing effect, imitation or rhyme, but in

[1] *Céladon*, a rustic lover in *Astrée*, a French novel in five volumes, named after the heroine, and written by d'Urfé (d. 1625).—TR.

[2] *Arcadia*, ed. fol. 1629, p. 117.

[3] *Ibid.* book ii. p. 114.

this creative and superior conception by which the artist dresses and embellishes nature. At the same time, he is an ardent man, trusting in the nobleness of his aspirations and in the width of his ideas, who scorns the brawling of the shoppy, narrow, vulgar Puritanism, and glows with the lofty irony, the proud freedom, of a poet and a lord.

In his eyes, if there is any art or science capable of augmenting and cultivating our generosity, it is poetry. He draws comparison after comparison between it and philosophy or history, whose pretensions he laughs at and dismisses.[1] He fights for poetry as a knight for his lady, and in what heroic and splendid style! He says:

'I never heard the old Song of Percie and Douglas, that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet: and yet it is sung but by some blinde Crowder, with no rougher voyce, than rude stile; which beeing so evill apparelled in the dust and Cobweb of that uncivill age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindare?'[2]

The philosopher repels, the poet attracts:

'Nay hee doth as if your journey should lye through a faire vineyard, at the very first, give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that tast, you may long to passe further.'[3]

What description of poetry can displease you? Pastoral so easy and genial?

'Is it the bitter but wholesome Iambicke, who rubbes the galled minde, making shame the Trumpet of villanie, with bold and open crying out against naughtinesse?'[4]

At the close he reviews his arguments, and the vibrating martial accent of his poetical period is like a trump of victory:

'So that since the excellencies of it (poetry) may bee so easily and so justly confirmed, and the low-creeping objections so soone trodden downe, it not being an Art of lyes, but of true doctrine; not of effeminatenesse, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthning man's wit; not banished, but honoured by Plato; let us rather plant more Laurels for to ingarland the Poets heads than suffer the ill-savoured breath of such wrong speakers, once to blow upon the cleare springs of Poesie.'[5]

From such vehemence and gravity you may anticipate what his verses will be.

Often, after reading the poets of this age, I have looked for some

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[1] *The Defence of Poesie*, ed. fol. 1629, p. 558: 'I dare undertake, that Orlando Furioso, or honest King Arthur, will never displease a soldier: but the quidditie of *Ens* and *prima materia*, will hardly agree with a Corselet.' See also, in these pages, the very lively and spirited personification of History and Philosophy. It contains genuine talent.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 553. [3] *Ibid.* p. 550. [4] *Ibid.* p. 552.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 560. Here and there we find also verse as spirited as this:

'Or Pindar's Apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,
Enam'ling with pide flowers their thoughts of gold.'—(3d Sonnet.)

time at the contemporary prints, telling myself that man, body and soul, was not then such as we see him to-day. We also have our passions, but we are no longer strong enough to bear them. They distract us; we are not poets without suffering for it. Alfred de Musset, Heine, Edgar Poe, Burns, Byron, Shelley, Cowper, how many shall I instance? Disgust, mental and bodily degradation, disease, impotence, madness, suicide, at best a permanent hallucination or feverish raving,—these are now-a-days the ordinary issues of the poetic temperament. The passion of the brain gnaws our vitals, dries up the blood, eats into the marrow, shakes us like a tempest, and the skeleton man, to which civilisation has reduced us, is not substantial enough long to resist it. They, who have been more roughly trained, who are more inured to the inclemencies of climate, more hardened by bodily exercise, more firm against danger, endure and live. Is there a man living who could withstand the storm of passions and visions which swept over Shakspeare, and end, like him, as a sensible citizen and landed proprietor in his small county? The muscles were firmer, the despair less prompt. The rage of concentrated attention, the half hallucinations, the anguish and heaving of the heart, the quivering of the limbs stretching involuntarily and blindly for action, all the painful impulses which accompany large desires, exhausted them less; this is why they desired longer, and dared more. D'Aubigné, wounded with many sword-thrusts, conceiving death at hand, had himself bound on his horse that he might see his mistress once more, and rode thus several leagues, losing blood, and arriving in a swoon. Such feelings we glean still in their portraits, in the straight looks which pierce like a sword; in this strength of back, bent or twisted; in the sensuality, energy, enthusiasm, which breathe from their attitude or look. Such feelings we still discover in their poetry, in Greene, Lodge, Jonson, Spenser, Shakspeare, in Sidney, as in all the rest. We quickly forget the faults of taste which accompany it, the affectation, the uncouth jargon. Is it really so uncouth? Imagine a man who with closed eyes distinctly sees the adored countenance of his mistress, who keeps it before him all the day; who is troubled and shaken as he imagines ever and anon her brow, her lips, her eyes; who cannot and would not be separated from his vision; who sinks daily deeper in this passionate contemplation; who is every instant crushed by mortal anxieties, or transported by the raptures of bliss: he will lose the exact conception of objects. A fixed idea becomes a false idea. By dint of regarding an object under all its forms, turning it over, piercing through it, we at last deform it. When we cannot think of a thing without dimness and tears, we magnify it, and give it a nature which it has not. Then strange comparisons, overrefined ideas, excessive images, become natural. However far Sidney goes, whatever object he touches, he sees throughout the universe only the name and features of Stella. All ideas bring him back to her. He is drawn ever and invincibly by the same thought; and comparisons which

seem far-fetched, only express the unfailing presence and sovereign power of the besetting image. Stella is ill; it seems to Sidney that 'Joy, which is inseparate from those eyes, Stella, now learnes (strange case) to weepe in thee.'[1] To us, the expression is absurd. Is it for Sidney, who for hours together had dwelt on the expression of those eyes, seeing in them at last all the beauties of heaven and earth, who, compared to them, finds all light dull and all joy stale? Consider that in every extreme passion ordinary laws are reversed, that our logic cannot pass judgment on it, that we find in it affectation, childishness, fancifulness, crudity, folly, and that to us violent conditions of the nervous machine are like an unknown and marvellous land, where common sense and good language cannot penetrate. On the return of spring, when May spreads over the fields her dappled dress of new flowers, Astrophel and Stella sit in the shade of a retired grove, in the warm air, full of birds' voices and pleasant exhalations. Heaven smiles, the wind kisses the trembling leaves, the inclining trees interlace their sappy branches, amorous earth sighs greedily for the rippling water:

'In a grove most rich of shade,
Where birds wanton musicke made,
May, then yong, his py'd weeds showing,
New perfum'd with flowers fresh growing,

'Astrophel with Stella sweet,
Did for mutuall comfort meet,
Both within themselves oppressed,
But each in the other blessed. . . .

'Their eares hungry of each word,
Which the deere tongue would afford,
But their tongues restrain'd from walking,
Till their hearts had ended talking.

'But when their tongues could not speake,
Love it selfe did silence breake;
Love did set his lips asunder,
Thus to speake in love and wonder. . . .

'This small winde which so sweet is,
See how it the leaves doth kisse,
Each tree in his best attyring,
Sense of love to love inspiring.'[2]

On his knees, with beating heart, oppressed, it seems to him that his mistress is transformed: .

'Stella, soveraigne of my joy, . . .
Stella, starre of heavenly fire,
Stella, load-starre of desire,

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, ed. fol. 1629, 101st sonnet, p. 613.
[2] *Ibid.* 8th song, p. 603.

Stella, in whose shining eyes
Are the lights of Cupid's skies. . . .
Stella, whose voice when it speakes
Senses all asunder breakes;
Stella, whose voice when it singeth,
Angels to acquaintance bringeth.'[1]

These cries of adoration are like a hymn. Every day he writes thoughts of love which agitate him, and in this long journal of a hundred pages we feel the inflamed breath swell each moment. A smile from his mistress, a curl lifted by the wind, a gesture,—all are events. He paints her in every attitude; he cannot see her too constantly. He talks to the birds, plants, winds, all nature. He brings the whole world to Stella's feet. At the notion of a kiss he swoons:

'Thinke of that most gratefull time
When thy leaping heart will climbe,
In my lips to have his biding.
There those roses for to kisse,
Which doe breath a sugred blisse,
Opening rubies, pearles dividing.'[2]

'O joy, too high for my low stile to show:
O blisse, fit for a nobler state then me:
Envie, put out thine eyes, lest thou do see
What Oceans of delight in me do flow.
My friend, that oft saw through all maskes my wo,
Come, come, and let me powre my selfe on thee;
Gone is the winter of my miserie,
My spring appeares, O see what here doth grow,
For Stella hath with words where faith doth shine,
Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchie:
I, I, O I may say that she is mine.'[3]

There are Oriental splendours in the sparkling sonnet in which he asks why Stella's cheeks have grown pale:

'Where be those Roses gone, which sweetned so our eyes?
Where those red cheekes, which oft with faire encrease doth frame
The height of honour in the kindly badge of shame?
Who hath the crimson weeds stolne from my morning skies?'[4]

As he says, his 'life melts with too much thinking.' Exhausted by ecstasy, he pauses; then he flies from thought to thought, seeking a cure for his wound, like the Satyr whom he describes:

'Prometheus, when first from heaven hie
He brought downe fire, ere then on earth not seene,
Fond of delight, a Satyr standing by,
Gave it a kisse, as it like sweet had beene.

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[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, 8th song, p. 603.
[2] *Ibid.* 10th song, p. 610.
[3] *Ibid.* sonnet 69, p. 555.
[4] *Ibid.* sonnet 102, p. 614.

'Feeling forthwith the other burning power,
Wood with the smart with showts and shryking shrill,
He sought his ease in river, field, and bower,
But for the time his griefe went with him still.'[1]

At last calm returned; and whilst this calm lasts, the lively, glowing spirit plays like a flame on the surface of the deep brooding fire. His love-songs and word-portraits, delightful pagan and chivalric fancies, seem to be inspired by Petrarch or Plato. One feels the charm and liveliness under the seeming affectation:

'Faire eyes, sweete lips, deare heart, that foolish I
Could hope by Cupids helpe on you to pray;
Since to himselfe he doth your gifts apply,
As his maine force, choise sport, and easefull stray.

'For when he will see who dare him gainsay,
Then with those eyes he lookes, lo by and by
Each soule doth at Loves feet his weapons lay,
Glad if for her he give them leave to die.

'When he will play, then in her lips he is,
Where blushing red, that Loves selfe them doth love,
With either lip he doth the other kisse:
But when he will for quiets sake remove
From all the world, her heart is then his rome,
Where well he knowes, no man to him can come.'[2]

Both heart and sense are captive here. If he finds the eyes of Stella more beautiful than anything in the world, he finds her soul more lovely than her body. He is a Platonist when he recounts how Virtue, wishing to be loved of men, took Stella's form to enchant their eyes, and make them see the heaven which the inner sense reveals to heroic souls. We recognise in him that entire submission of heart, love turned into a religion, perfect passion which asks only to grow, and which, like the piety of the mystics, finds itself too insignificant when it compares itself with the object loved:

'My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toyes,
My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
Which for reward spoyle it with vaine annoyes,
I see my course to lose my selfe doth bend:
I see and yet no greater sorrow take,
Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake.'[3]

At last, like Socrates in the banquet, he turns his eyes to deathless beauty, heavenly brightness:

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[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, p. 525: this sonnet is headed E. D. Wood, in his *Athen. Oxon.* i., says it was written by Sir Edward Dyer, Chancellor of the Most noble Order of the Garter.—TR.

[2] *Ibid.* sonnet 43, p. 545.

[3] *Ibid.* sonnet 18, p. 573.

'Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust,
And thou my minde aspire to higher things:
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust:
Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings. . . .
O take fast hold, let that light be thy guide,
In this small course which birth drawes out to death.'[1]

Divine love continues the earthly love; he was imprisoned in this, and frees himself. By this nobility, these lofty aspirations, recognise one of those serious souls of which there are so many in the same climate and race. Spiritual instincts pierce through the dominant paganism, and ere they make Christians, make Platonists.

V.

Sidney was only a soldier in an army; there is a multitude about him, a multitude of poets. In fifty-two years, beyond the drama, two hundred and thirty-three are enumerated,[2] of whom forty have genius or talent: Breton, Donne, Drayton, Lodge, Greene, the two Fletchers, Beaumont, Spenser, Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Wither, Warner, Davison, Carew, Suckling, Herrick;—we should grow tired in counting them. There is a crop of them, and so there is at the same time in Catholic and heroic Spain; and as in Spain, it was a sign of the times, the mark of a public want, the index to an extraordinary and transient condition of the mind. What is this condition which gives rise to so universal a taste for poetry? What is it breathes life into their books? How happens it, that amongst the least, in spite of pedantries, awkwardnesses, in the rhyming chronicles or descriptive cyclopedias, we meet with brilliant pictures and genuine love-cries? How happens it, that when this generation was exhausted, true poetry ended in England, as true painting in Italy and Flanders? It was because an epoch of the mind came and passed away,—that, namely, of instinctive and creative conception. These men had new senses, and no theories in their heads. Their emotions were not the same as ours. What is the sunrise to an ordinary man? A white smudge on the edge of the sky, between bosses of clouds, amid pieces of land, and bits of road, which he sees not because he has seen them a hundred times. But for them, all things have a soul; I mean that they feel naturally, within themselves, the uprising and severance of the outlines, the power and contrast of tints, the sad or delicious sentiment, which breathes from this combination and union like a harmony or a cry. How sorrowful is the sun, as he rises in a mist above the sad sea-furrows; what an air of resignation in the old trees rustling in the night rain; what a feverish tumult in the mass of waves,

[1] Last sonnet, p. 539.

[2] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, i. Part 2, ch. 2, 3, 4. Among these 233 poets the authors of isolated pieces are not reckoned, but only those who published or gathered their works together.

whose dishevelled locks are twisted for ever on the surface of the abyss! But the great torch of heaven, the luminous god, emerges and shines; the tall, soft, pliant herbs, the evergreen meadows, the expanding roof of lofty oaks,—the whole English landscape, continually renewed and illumined by the flooding moisture, diffuses an inexhaustible freshness. These meadows, red and white with flowers, ever moist and ever young, slip off their veil of golden mist, and appear suddenly, timidly, like beautiful virgins. Here is the cuckoo-flower, which springs up before the coming of the swallow. Drayton, in his *Polyolbion*, sings:

'Then from her burnisht gate the goodly glittring East
Guilds every lofty top, which late the humorous night
Bespangled had with pearle, to please the Mornings sight:
On which the mirthfull Quires, with their clere open throats,
Unto the joyfull Morne so straine their warbling notes,
That Hills and Valleys ring, and even the ecchoing Ayre
Seemes all compos'd of sounds, about them everywhere. . . .
Thus sing away the Morne, untill the mounting Sunne,
Through thick exhaled fogs, his golden head hath runne,
And through the twisted tops of our close Covert creeps,
To kiss the gentle Shade, this while that sweetly sleeps.'[1]

A step further, and you will find the old gods reappear. They reappear, these living gods—these living gods mingled with things which you cannot help meeting as soon as you meet nature again. Shakspeare, in the *Tempest*, sings:

'Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and pease;
Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,
And flat meads thatch'd with stover, them to keep;
Thy banks with pioned and twilled brims,
Which spongy April at thy hest betrims,
To make cold nymphs chaste crowns . . .
Hail, many-colour'd messenger (Iris.) . . .
Who with thy saffron wings upon my flowers
Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing showers,
And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown
My bosky acres and my unshrubb'd down.'[2]

In *Cymbeline* he says:

'As gentle as zephyrs blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head.'[3]

Greene, in *Never too Late*, says:

'When Flora proud, in pomp of all her flowers,
Sat bright and gay,
And gloried in the dew of Iris' showers,
And did display
Her mantle chequer'd all with gaudy green.'[4]

[1] M. Drayton's *Polyolbion*, ed. 1622, 13th song, p. 214.
[2] Act iv. 1. [3] Act iv. 2.
[4] Greene's Poems, ed. Bell, *Eurymachus in Laudem Mirimidæ*, p. 73.

In the same piece he speaks:

'How oft have I descending Titan seen,
His burning locks couch in the sea-queen's lap,
And beauteous Thetis his red body wrap
In watery robes, as he her lord had been!'[1]

So Spenser, in his *Faërie Queene*, sings:

'The ioyous day gan early to appeare;
And fayre Aurora from the deawy bed
Of aged Tithone gan herself to reare
With rosy cheekes, for shame as blushing red:
Her golden locks, for hast, were loosely shed
About her eares, when Una her did marke
Clymbe to her charet, all with flowers spred,
From heven high to chace the chearelesse darke;
With mery note her lowd salutes the mounting larke.'[2]

All the splendour and sweetness of this well-watered land; all the specialties, the opulence of its dissolving tints, of its variable sky, its luxuriant vegetation, assemble about the gods, who gave them their beautiful form.

In the life of every man there are moments when, in presence of objects, he experiences a shock. This mass of ideas, of mangled recollections, of mutilated images, which lie hidden in all corners of his mind, are set in motion, organised, suddenly developed like a flower. He is enraptured; he cannot help looking at and admiring the charming creature which has just appeared; he wishes to see it still, and others like it, and dreams of nothing else. There are such moments in the life of nations, and this is one of them. They are happy in contemplating beautiful things, and wish only that they should be the most beautiful possible. They are not preoccupied, as we are, with theories. They do not labour to express moral or philosophical ideas. They wish to enjoy through the imagination, through the eyes, like these Italian nobles, who, at the same time, were so captivated by fine colours and forms, that they covered with paintings not only their rooms and their churches, but the lids of their chests and the saddles of their horses. The rich and green sunny country; young, gaily-attired ladies, blooming with health and love; half-draped gods and goddesses, masterpieces and models of strength and grace,—these are the most lovely objects which man can contemplate, the most capable of satisfying his senses and his heart—of giving rise to smiles and to joy; and these are the objects which occur in all the poets in a most wonderful abundance of songs, pastorals, sonnets, little fugitive pieces, so lively, delicate, easily unfolded, that we have never since had their equals. What though Venus and Cupid have lost their altars? Like

[1] Greene's Poems, *Melicertus' description of his Mistress*, p. 38.
[2] Spenser's *Works*, ed. Todd, 1863, *The Faërie Queene*, i. c. 11, st. 51.

the contemporary painters of Italy, they willingly imagine a beautiful naked child, drawn on a chariot of gold through the limpid air; or a woman, redolent with youth, standing on the waves, which kiss her snowy feet. Harsh Ben Jonson is ravished with the scene. The disciplined battalion of his sturdy verses changes into a band of little graceful strophes, which trip as lightly as Raphael's children. He sees his lady approach, sitting on the chariot of Love, drawn by swans and doves. Love leads the car; she passes calm and smiling, and all hearts, charmed by her divine looks, wish no other joy than to see and serve her for ever.

'See the chariot at hand here of Love,
Wherein my lady rideth!
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,
And well the car Love guideth.
As she goes, all hearts do duty
Unto her beauty;
And, enamour'd, do wish, so they might
But enjoy such a sight,
That they still were to run by her side,
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.
Do but look on her eyes, they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth! . . .
Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall o' the snow,
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!'[1]

What more lively, more unlike measured and artificial mythology? Like Theocritus and Moschus, they play with their laughing gods, and their belief becomes a festival. One day, in an alcove of a wood, Cupid meets a nymph asleep:

'Her golden hair o'erspread her face,
Her careless arms abroad were cast,
Her quiver had her pillow's place,
Her breast lay bare to every blast.'[2]

He approaches softly, steals her arrows, and puts his own in their place. She hears a noise at last, raises her reclining head, and sees a

[1] Ben Jonson's Poems, ed. R. Bell. *Celebration of Charis; her Triumph*, p. 125.
[2] *Cupid's Pastime*, unknown author, ab. 1621.

shepherd approaching, She flees; he pursues. She strings her bow, and shoots her arrows at him. He only becomes more ardent, and is on the point of seizing her. In despair, she takes an arrow, and buries it in her lovely body. Lo! she is changed, she stops, smiles, loves, draws near him.

'Though mountains meet not, lovers may.
What other lovers do, did they.
The god of Love sat on a tree,
And taught that pleasant sight to see.'[1]

A drop of malice falls into the medley of artlessness and voluptuousness; it was so in Longus, and in all that delicious nosegay called the *Anthology*. Not the dry mocking of Voltaire, of folks who possessed only wit, and always lived in a drawing-room; but the raillery of artists, lovers whose brains are full of colour and form, who, when they recount a bit of roguishness, imagine a stooping neck, lowered eyes, the blushing of vermilion cheeks. One of these fair ones says the following verses, simpering, and we can even see now the pouting of her lips:

'Love in my bosom like a bee
Doth suck his sweet.
Now with his wings he plays with me,
Now with his feet.

Within my eyes he makes his rest,
His bed amid my tender breast,
My kisses are his daily feast.
And yet he robs me of my rest.
Ah! wanton, will ye!'[2]

What relieves these sportive pieces is their splendour of imagination. There are effects and flashes which one hardly dare quote, dazzling and maddening, as in the *Song of Songs:*

'Her eyes, fair eyes, like to the purest lights
That animate the sun, or cheer the day,
In whom the shining sunbeams brightly play,
Whiles fancy doth on them divine delights.

Her cheeks like ripened lilies steeped in wine,
Or fair pomegranate kernels washed in milk,
Or snow-white threads in nets of crimson silk,
Or gorgeous clouds upon the sun's decline.

Her lips are roses over-washed with dew,
Or like the purple of Narcissus' flower . . .

Her crystal chin like to the purest mould
Enchased with dainty daisies soft and white,
Where fancy's fair pavilion once is pight,
Whereas embraced his beauties he doth hold.

[1] *Cupid's Pastime*, unknown author, ab. 1621.
[2] *Rosalind's Madrigal.*

Her neck like to an ivory shining tower,
Where through with azure veins sweet nectar runs,
Or like the down of swans where Seriesse woons,
Or like delight that doth itself devour.

Her paps are like fair apples in the prime,
As round as orient pearls, as soft as down;
They never vail their fair through winter's frown,
But from their sweets love sucked his summer time.'[1]

'What need compare, where sweet exceeds compare?
Who draws his thoughts of love from senseless things,
Their pomp and greatest glories doth impair,
And mounts love's heaven with overladen wings.'[2]

I can well believe that things had no more beauty then than now; but I am sure that men found them more beautiful.

When the power of embellishment is so great, it is natural that they should paint the sentiment which unites all joys, whither all dreams converge, ideal love, and in particular, artless and happy love. Of all sentiments, there is none for which we have more sympathy. It is of all the most simple and sweet. It is the first motion of the heart, and the first word of nature. It is made up of innocence and self-abandonment. It is clear of reflections and effort. It extricates us from complicated passion, contempt, regret, hate, violent desires. It penetrates us, and we breathe it as the fresh breath of the morning wind, which has swept over flowery meads. They inhaled it, and were enraptured, the knights of this perilous court, and so rested in the contrast from their actions and their dangers. The most severe and tragic of their poets turned aside to meet it, Shakspeare among the evergreen oaks of the forest of Arden,[3] Ben Jonson in the woods of Sherwood,[4] amid the wide shady glades, the shining leaves and moist flowers, trembling on the margin of lonely springs. Marlowe himself, the terrible painter of the agony of Edward II., the impressive and powerful poet, who wrote *Faustus*, *Tamerlane*, and the *Jew of Malta*, leaves his sanguinary dramas, his high-sounding verse, his images of fury, and nothing can be more musical and sweet than his song. A shepherd, to gain his lady-love, says to her:

'Come live with me and be my Love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield.
There we will sit upon the rocks,
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,

[1] Greene's *Poems*, ed. R. Bell, *Menaphon's Eclogue*, p. 41.
[2] *Ibid. Melicertus' Eclogue*, p. 43.
[3] *As you Like it.*
[4] *The Sad Shepherd.* See also Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess.*

By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.
There I will make thee beds of roses,
And a thousand fragrant posies;
A cap of flowers and a kirtle,
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.
A gown made of the finest wool,
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.
A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my Love. . . .
The shepherd swains shall dance and sing,
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my Love.'[1]

The unpolished gentlemen of the period, returning from a falcon hunt, were more than once arrested by such a rustic picture; such as they were, that is to say, imaginative and not very citizen-like, they had dreamed of figuring in them on their own account. But while entering into, they reconstructed them; in their parks, prepared for the queen's entrance, with a profusion of costumes and devices, not troubling themselves to copy rough nature exactly. Improbability did not disturb them; they were not minute imitators, students of manners: they created; the country for them was but a setting, and the complete picture came from their fancies and their hearts. Romantic it may have been, even impossible, but it was on this account the more charming. Is there a greater charm than putting on one side this actual world which fetters or oppresses us, to float vaguely and easily in the azure and the light, on the summit of the land of fairies and clouds, to arrange things according to the pleasure of the moment, no longer feeling the oppressive laws, the harsh and resisting framework of life, adorning and varying everything after the caprice and the refinements of fancy? That is what is done in these little poems. Usually the events are such as happen nowhere, or happen in the land where kings turn shepherds and marry shepherdesses. The beautiful Argentile[2] is detained at her uncle's court, who wishes to deprive her of her kingdom,

[1] This poem was, and still is, frequently attributed to Shakspeare. It appears as his in Knight's edition, published a few years ago. Isaac Walton, however, writing about fifty years after Marlowe's death, attributes it to him. In Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* it is also ascribed to the same author. As a confirmation, let us state that Ithamore, in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, says to the courtesan (Act iv. Sc. 4): 'Thou in those groves, by Dis above,
Shalt live with me, and be my love.'—TR.

[2] *Chalmers' English Poets*, William Warner, *Fourth Book of Albion's England*, ch. xx. p. 551.

and commands her to marry Curan, a boor in his service; she flees, and Curan in despair goes and lives two years among the shepherds. One day he meets a beautiful country-woman, and loves her; while speaking to her he thinks of Argentile, and weeps; he describes her sweet face, her lithe figure, her blue-veined delicate wrists, and suddenly sees that the peasant girl is weeping. She falls into his arms, and says, 'I am Argentile.' Now Curan was a king's son, who had disguised himself thus for love of Argentile. He resumes his armour, and defeats the wicked king. There was never a braver knight; and they both reigned long in Northumberland. From a hundred such tales, tales of the spring-time, the reader will perhaps bear with me while I pick out one more, gay and simple as a May morning. The Princess Dowsabel came down one morning into her father's garden: she gathers honeysuckles, primroses, violets, and daisies; then, behind a hedge, she heard a shepherd singing, and that so finely that she loved him at once. He promises to be faithful, and asks for a kiss. Her cheeks became as crimson as a rose:

'With that she bent her snow-white knee,
Down by the shepherd kneeled she,
And him she sweetly kiss'd.
With that the shepherd whoop'd for joy;
Quoth he: "There's never shepherd boy
That ever was so blest."'[1]

Nothing more; is it not enough? It is but a moment's fancy; but they had such fancies every moment. Think what poetry was likely to spring from them, how superior to common events, how free from literal imitation, how smitten with ideal beauty, how capable of creating a world beyond our sad world. In fact, among all these poems there is one truly divine, so divine that the reasoners of succeeding ages have found it wearisome, that even now but few understand it—Spenser's *Faërie Queene*.

One day Monsieur Jourdain, having turned Mamamouchi[2] and learned orthography, sent for the most illustrious writers of the age. He settled himself in his arm-chair, pointed with his finger at several folding-stools for them to sit down, and said:

'I have read your little productions, gentlemen. They have afforded me much pleasure. I wish to give you some work to do. I have given some lately to little Lulli,[3] your fellow-labourer. It was at my command that he introduced the sea-shell at his concerts,—a melodious instrument, which no one knew of before, and which has such a pleasing effect. I insist that you will work out my ideas as he

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[1] *Chalmers' English Poets*, M. Drayton's *Fourth Eclogue*, iv. p. 486.

[2] Mons. Jourdain is the hero of Molière's comedy, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, the type of a vulgar and successful upstart; Mamamouchi is a mock dignity.—Tr.

[3] Lulli, a celebrated Italian composer of the time of Molière.—Tr.

has worked them out, and I give you an order for a poem in prose. What is not prose, you know, is verse; and what is not verse, is prose. When I say, "Nicolle, bring me my slippers and give me my night-cap," I speak prose. Take this sentence as your model. This style is much more pleasing than the jargon of unfinished lines which you call verse. As for the subject, let it be myself. You will describe my flowered dressing-gown which I have put on to receive you in, and this little green velvet undress which I wear underneath, to do my morning exercise in. You will set down that this chintz costs a louis an ell. The description, if well worked out, will furnish some very pretty paragraphs, and will enlighten the public as to the cost of things. I desire also that you should speak of my mirrors, my carpets, my hangings. My tradesmen will let you have their bills; don't fail to put them in. I shall be glad to read in your works, all fully and naturally set forth, about my father's shop, who, like a real gentleman, sold cloth to oblige his friends; my maid Nicolle's kitchen, the genteel behaviour of Brusquet, the little dog of my neighbour M. Dimanche. You might also explain my domestic affairs: there is nothing more interesting to the public than to hear how a million may be scraped together. Tell them also that my daughter Lucile has not married that little rascal Cléonte, but M. Samuel Bernard, who made his fortune as a *fermier-général*, keeps his carriage, and is going to be a minister of state. For this I will pay you liberally, half a louis for a yard of writing. Come back in a month, and let me see what my ideas have suggested to you.'

We are the descendants of M. Jourdain, and this is how we have been talking to the men of talent from the beginning of the century, and the men of talent have listened to us. Hence arise our shoppy and realistic novels. I pray the reader to forget them, to forget himself, to become for a while a poet, a gentleman, a man of the sixteenth century. Unless we bury the M. Jourdain who survives in us, we shall never understand Spenser.

VI.

Spenser belonged to an ancient family, allied to great houses; was a friend of Sidney and Raleigh, the two most accomplished knights of the age—a knight himself, at least in heart; who had found in his connections, his friendships, his studies, his life, everything calculated to lead him to ideal poetry. We find him at Cambridge, where he imbues himself with the noblest ancient philosophies; in a northern country, where he passes through a deep and unfortunate passion; at Penshurst, in the castle and in the society where the *Arcadia* was produced; with Sidney, in whom survived entire the romantic poetry and heroic generosity of the feudal spirit; at court, where all the splendours of a disciplined and gorgeous chivalry were gathered about the throne; finally, at Kilcolman, on the borders of a beautiful lake,

in a lonely castle, from which the view embraced an amphitheatre of mountains, and the half of Ireland. Poor on the other hand, not fit for court, and though favoured by the queen, unable to obtain from his patrons anything but inferior employment; in the end, tired of solicitations, and banished to dangerous Ireland, whence a revolt expelled him, after his house and child had been burned; he died three months later, of misery and a broken heart.[1] Expectations and rebuffs, many sorrows and many dreams, some few joys, and a sudden and frightful calamity, a small fortune and a premature end; this indeed was a poet's life. But the heart within was the true poet—from it all proceeded; circumstances furnished the subject only; he transformed them more than they him; he received less than he gave. Philosophy and landscapes, ceremonies and ornaments, splendours of the country and the court, on all which he painted or thought, he impressed his inward nobleness. Before all, his was a soul captivated by sublime and chaste beauty, eminently platonic; one of these lofty and refined souls most charming of all, who, born in the lap of nature, draw thence their mother's milk, but soar above, enter the regions of mysticism, and mount instinctively in order to open at the confines of another world. Spenser leads us to Milton, and thence to Puritanism, as Plato to Virgil, and thence to Christianity. Sensuous beauty is perfect in both, but their main worship is for moral beauty. He appeals to the Muses:

> 'Revele to me the sacred noursery
> Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,
> Where it in silver bowre does hidden ly
> From view of men and wicked worlds disdaine!'

He encourages his knight when he sees him droop. He is wroth when he sees him attacked. He rejoices in his justice, temperance, courtesy. He introduces in the beginning of a song, stanzas in honour of friendship and justice. He pauses, after relating a lovely instance of chastity, to exhort women to modesty. He pours out the wealth of his respect and tenderness at his heroine's feet. If any coarse man insults them, he calls to their aid nature and the gods. Never does he bring them on his stage without adorning their name with splendid eulogy. He has an adoration for beauty worthy of Dante and Plotinus. And this, because he never considers it a mere harmony of colour and form, but an emanation of unique, heavenly, imperishable beauty, which no mortal eye can see, and which is the prime work of the great Author of the worlds.[2] Bodies only render it sensible; it does not live in the bodies; grace and attraction are

[1] 'He died for want of bread, in King Street.' Ben Jonson, quoted by Drummond.

[2] *Hymns of Love and Beauty; of heavenly Love and Beauty.*

not in things, but in the deathless idea which shines through the things:

'For that same goodly hew of white and red,
With which the cheekes are sprinckled, shall decay,
And those sweete rosy leaves, so fairly spred
Upon the lips, shall fade and fall away
To that they were, even to corrupted clay:
That golden wyre, those sparckling stars so bright,
Shall turne to dust, and lose their goodly light.
But that faire lampe, from whose celestiall ray
That light proceedes, which kindleth lovers fire,
Shall never be extinguisht nor decay;
But, when the vitall spirits doe expyre,
Upon her native planet shall retyre;
For it is heavenly borne, and cannot die,
Being a parcell of the purest skie.'[1]

In presence of this ideal of beauty, love is transformed:

'For Love is lord of Truth and Loialtie,
Lifting himself out of the lowly dust,
On golden plumes up to the purest skie,
Above the reach of loathly sinfull lust,
Whose base affect through cowardly distrust
Of his weake wings dare not to heaven fly,
But like a moldwarpe in the earth doth ly.'[2]

Love such as this contains all that is good, and fine, and noble. It is the prime source of life, and of the eternal soul of things. It is this love which, pacifying the primitive discord, has created the harmony of the spheres, and maintains this glorious universe. It dwells in God, and is God Himself, descended in bodily form to regenerate the tottering world and save the human race; around and within animated beings, when our eyes can pierce it, we behold it as a living light, penetrating and embracing every creature. We touch here the sublime sharp summit where the world of mind and the world of senses unite; where man, gathering with both hands the loveliest flowers of either, feels himself at the same time a pagan and a Christian.

So much, as a testimony to his heart. But he was also a poet, that is, pre-eminently a creator and a dreamer, and that most naturally, instinctively, unceasingly. We might go on for ever describing this inward condition of all great artists; there would still remain much to be described. It is a sort of spiritual growth with them; at every instant a bud shoots forth, and on this another, and still

[1] *A Hymne in Honour of Beautie*, v. 92–105.
[2] *A Hymne in Honour of Love*, v. 176–182.

another; each producing, increasing, blooming of itself, so that instantaneously we find first a plant, then a thicket, then a forest. A character appears to them, then an action, then a landscape, then a succession of actions, characters, landscapes, producing, completing, arranging themselves by instinctive development, as when in a dream we behold a train of figures which spread out and group themselves before our eyes. This fount of living and changing forms is inexhaustible in Spenser; he is always imaging; it is his specialty. He has but to close his eyes, and apparitions arise; they abound in him, crowd, overflow; in vain he pours them forth; they continually float up, more copious and more dense. Many times, following the inexhaustible stream, I have thought of the vapours which rise incessantly from the sea, ascend, sparkle, commingle their gold and snowy scrolls, while beneath them new mists arise, and others again beneath, and the splendid procession never grows dim or ceases.

But what distinguishes him from all others is the mode of his imagination. Generally with a poet his spirit ferments vehemently and by fits and starts; his ideas gather, jostle each other, suddenly appear in masses and heaps, and burst out in sharp, piercing, concentrative words; it seems that they need these sudden accumulations to imitate the unity and life-like energy of the objects which they reproduce; at least almost all the surrounding poets, Shakspeare at their head, act thus. Spenser remains calm in the fervour of invention. The visions which would be fever to another, leave him at peace. They come and spread before him, easily, entire, uninterrupted, without starts. He is epic, that is, a narrator, and not a singer like an ode-writer, nor a mimic like a play-writer. No modern is more like Homer. Like Homer and the great epic-writers, he presents consecutive and noble, almost classical images, so nearly ideas, that the mind seizes them unaided and unawares. Like Homer, he is always simple and clear: he makes no leap, he omits no argument, he robs no word of its primitive and ordinary sense, he preserves the natural sequence of ideas. Like Homer again, he is redundant, ingenuous, even childish. He says everything, he puts down reflections which we have made beforehand; he repeats without limit his ornamental epithets. We can see that he beholds objects in a beautiful uniform light, with infinite detail; that he wishes to show all this detail, never fearing to see his happy dream change or disappear; that he traces its outline with a regular movement, never hurrying or slackening. He is even a little prolix, too unmindful of the public, too ready to lose himself and fall into a dream. His thought expands in vast repeated comparisons, like those of the old Ionic poet. If a wounded giant falls, he finds him

> 'As an aged tree,
> High growing on the top of rocky clift,
> Whose hart-strings with keene steele nigh hewen be,

The mightie trunck halfe rent with ragged rift,
Doth roll adowne the rocks, and fall with fearefull drift.

Or as a castle, reared high and round,
By subtile engins and malitious slight
Is undermined from the lowest ground,
And her foundation forst, and feebled quight,
At last downe falles; and with her heaped hight
Her hastie ruine does more heavie make,
And yields it selfe unto the victours might:
Such was this Gyaunt's fall, that seemd to shake
The stedfast globe of earth, as it for feare did quake.'[1]

He develops all the ideas which he handles. He stretches all his phrases into periods. Instead of compressing, he expands. To bear this ample thought and its accompanying train, he requires a long stanza, ever renewed, long recurring lines, reiterated rhymes, whose uniformity and fulness recall majestic sounds which undulate eternally through the woods and the fields. To expand these epic faculties, and to expand them in the sublime region where his soul is naturally borne, he requires an ideal stage, situated beyond the bounds of reality, with personages who could hardly exist, and in a world which could never be.

He made many miscellaneous attempts in sonnets, elegies, pastorals, hymns of love, little sparkling word pictures;[2] they were but essays, incapable for the most part of supporting his genius. Yet already his magnificent imagination appeared in them; gods, men, landscapes, the world which he sets in motion is a thousand miles from that in which we live. His *Shepherd's Calendar*[3] is a pensive and tender pastoral, full of delicate loves, noble sorrows, lofty ideas, where no voice is heard but of thinkers and poets. His *Visions of Petrarch and Du Bellay* are admirable dreams, in which palaces, temples of gold, splendid landscapes, sparkling rivers, marvellous birds, appear alternately as in an Oriental fairy-tale. If he sings a 'Prothalamion,' he sees two beautiful swans, white as snow, who glide to the songs of nymphs amid vermeil roses, while the transparent water kisses their silken feathers, and murmurs with joy:

'There, in a meadow, by the river's side,
A flocke of Nymphes I chaunced to espy,
All lovely daughters of the Flood thereby,
With goodly greenish locks, all loose untyde,
As each had bene a bryde;
And each one had a little wicker basket,
Made of fine twigs, entrayled curiously,
In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket,

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, i. c. 8, st. 22, 23.

[2] *The Shepherd's Calendar, Amoretti, Sonnets, Prothalamion, Epithalamion, Muiopotmos, Virgil's Gnat, The Ruines of Time, The Teares of the Muses*, etc.

[3] Published in 1589; dedicated to Philip Sidney.

And with fine fingers cropt full feateously
The tender stalkes on hye.
Of every sort, which in that meadow grew,
They gathered some; the violet, pallid blew,
The little dazie, that at evening closes,
The virgin lillie, and the primrose trew,
With store of vermeil roses,
To deck their bridegroomes posies
Against the brydale-day, which was not long:
Sweet Themmes! runne softly, till I end my song.

With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe
Come softly swimming downe along the lee;
Two fairer birds I yet did never see;
The snow, which doth the top of Pindus strew,
Did never whiter shew . . .
So purely white they were,
That even the gentle stream, the which them bare,
Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare
To wet their silken feathers, least they might
Soyle their fayre plumes with water not so fayre,
And marre their beauties bright,
That shone as heavens light,
Against their brydale day, which was not long:
Sweet Themmes! runne softly, till I end my song!'[1]

If he bewails the death of Sidney, Sidney becomes a shepherd; he is slain like Adonis; around him gather weeping nymphs:

'The gods, which all things see, this same beheld,
And, pittying this paire of lovers trew,
Transformed them there lying on the field,
Into one flowre that is both red and blew:
It first growes red, and then to blew doth fade,
Like Astrophel, which thereinto was made.

And in the midst thereof a star appeares,
As fairly formd as any star in skyes:
Resembling Stella in her freshest yeares,
Forth darting beames of beautie from her eyes;
And all the day it standeth full of deow,
Which is the teares, that from her eyes did flow.'[2]

His most genuine sentiments become thus fairy-like. Magic is the mould of his mind, and impresses its shape on all that he imagines or thinks. Involuntarily he robs objects of their ordinary form. If he looks at a landscape, after an instant he sees it quite differently. He carries it, without knowing it, into an enchanted land; the azure heaven sparkles like a vault of diamonds, meadows are clothed with flowers, a biped population flutters in the sweet air, palaces of jasper

[1] *Prothalamion*, v. 19–54.

[2] *Astrophel*, v. 181–192.

shine among the trees, radiant ladies appear on carved balconies above galleries of emerald. This insensible toil of mind is like the slow crystallisations of nature. A moist twig is cast into the bottom of a mine, and is brought out again a hoop of diamonds.

At last he finds a subject which suits him, the greatest joy permitted to an artist. He removes his epic from the common ground which, in the hands of Homer and Dante, gave expression to a living creed, and depicted national heroes. He leads us to the summit of fairy-land, on that extreme verge where objects vanish and pure idealism begins:

'I have undertaken a work,' he says, 'to represent all the moral vertues, assigning to every vertue a knight to be the patron and defender of the same: in whose actions and feats of armes and chivalry the operations of that vertue, whereof he is the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten downe and overcome.'[1]

In fact, he gives us an allegory as the foundation of his poem, not that he dreams of becoming a wit, a preacher of moralities, a propounder of riddles. He does not subordinate image to idea; he is a seer, not a philosopher. They are living men and actions which he sets in motion; only from time to time, enchanted palaces, a whole train of splendid visions trembles and divides like a mist, enabling us to catch a glimpse of the thought which raised and arranged it. When in his Garden of Venus we see the countless forms of all living things arranged in due order, in close compass, awaiting life, we conceive with him the birth of universal love, the ceaseless fertility of the great mother, the mysterious swarm of creatures which rise in succession from her far-reaching womb. When we see his Knight of the Cross, combating with a monstrous woman-serpent in defence of his beloved lady, Una, we dimly remember that, if we search beyond these two figures, we shall find behind one, Truth, behind the other, Falsehood. We perceive that his characters are not flesh and blood, and that all these brilliant phantoms are phantoms, and nothing more. We take pleasure in their brilliancy, without believing in their substantiality; we are interested in their acts, without troubling ourselves about their misfortunes. We know that their tears and cries are not real. Our emotion is purified and raised. We do not fall into gross illusion; we have that gentle feeling of knowing ourselves to be dreaming. We, like him, are a thousand leagues from actual life, beyond the pangs of painful pity, unmixed terror, urgent and bitter hatred. We entertain only refined sentiments, half defined, arrested at the moment that they were about to affect us with too sharp a stroke. They slightly touch us, and we find ourselves happy in being extricated from a belief which was beginning to be oppressive.

[1] Words attributed to him by Lodowick Bryskett, *Discourse of Civil Life*, ed. 1606, p. 26.

VII.

What world could furnish materials to so elevated a fancy? One only, that of chivalry; for none is so far from the actual. Alone and independent in his castle, freed from all the ties which society, family, toil, usually impose on the actions of men, the feudal hero had attempted every kind of adventure, but yet he had done less than he imagined: the boldness of his deeds had been exceeded by the madness of his dreams. For want of useful employment and an accepted rule, his brain had laboured on an unreasoning and impossible track, and the urgency of his wearisomeness had increased beyond measure his craving for excitement. Under this stimulus his poetry had become a world of imagery. Insensibly strange conceptions had grown and multiplied in his brains, one over the other, like ivy woven round a tree, and the original stock had disappeared beneath their rank growth and their obstruction. The delicate fancies of the old Welsh poetry, the grand ruins of the German epics, the marvellous splendours of the conquered East, all the relics which four centuries of adventure had dispersed among the minds of men, had become gathered into one great dream; and giants, dwarfs, monsters, the whole medley of imaginary creatures, of superhuman exploits and splendid follies, were grouped about a unique conception, exalted and sublime love, like courtiers prostrated at the feet of their king. It was an ample and an elastic subject-matter, from which the great artists of the age, Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Rabelais, had hewn their poems. But they belonged too completely to their own time, to admit of their belonging to one which had passed. They created a chivalry afresh, but it was not genuine. The ingenious Ariosto, an ironical epicurean, delights his gaze with it, and grows merry over it, like a man of pleasure, a sceptic who rejoices doubly in his pleasure, because it is sweet, and because it is forbidden. By his side poor Tasso, inspired by a fanatical, revived, factitious Catholicism, amid the tinsel of an old school of poetry, works on the same subject, in sickly fashion, with great effort and scant success. Cervantes, himself a knight, albeit he loves chivalry for its nobleness, perceives its folly, and crushes it to the ground, with heavy blows, in the mishaps of the wayside inns.[1] More coarsely, more openly, Rabelais, a rude commoner, drowns it with a burst of laughter in his merriment and nastiness. Spenser alone takes it seriously and naturally. He is on the level of so much nobleness, dignity, reverie. He is not yet settled and shut in by that species of exact common sense which was to found and cramp the whole modern civilisation. In his heart he inhabits the poetic and misty land from which men were daily drawing further and further away. He is enamoured of it, even to its very language; he retains

[1] 'Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away.'—BYRON'S *Don Juan*, canto xiii. st. xi.—TR.

the old words, the expressions of the middle-age, the style of Chaucer, especially in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. He enters straightway upon the strangest dreams of the old story-tellers, without astonishment, like a man who has still stranger ones on his own account. Enchanted castles, monsters and giants, duels in the woods, wandering ladies, all spring up under his hands, the mediæval fancy with the mediæval generosity; and it is just because this world is unlifelike that this world suits his humour.

Is there in chivalry sufficient to furnish him with matter? That is but one world, and he has another. Beyond the valiant men, the glorified images of moral virtues, he has the gods, finished models of sensible beauty; beyond Christian chivalry he has the pagan Olympus; beyond the idea of heroic will, which can only be satisfied by adventures and danger, he has the idea of calm energy, which is found in itself to be in harmony with actual existence. For such a poet there is not enough in one ideal; beside the beauty of effort he places the beauty of happiness; he couples them, not with the preconception of a philosopher, nor the design of a scholar like Goethe, but because they are both lovely; and here and there, amid weapons and passages of arms, he distributes satyrs, nymphs, Diana, Venus, like Greek statues amid the turrets and lofty trees of an English park. There is nothing forced in the union; the ideal epic, like a heaven above them, unites and harmonises the two worlds; a beautiful pagan dream carries on a beautiful dream of chivalry; the link consists in the fact that they are both beautiful. At this elevation the poet has ceased to observe the differences of races and civilisations. He can introduce into his picture whatever he will; his only reason is, 'That suited;' and there could be no better. Under the glossy-leaved oaks, by the old trunk so deeply rooted in the ground, he can see two knights cleaving each other, and the next instant a company of Fauns who came there to dance. The beams of light which have poured down upon the velvet moss, the wet turf of an English forest, can reveal the dishevelled locks and white shoulders of nymphs. Have you not seen it in Rubens? And what signify discrepancies in the happy and sublime illusion of a fancy? Are there more discrepancies? Who perceives them, who feels them? Who feels not, on the contrary, that to speak truth, there is but one world, that of Plato and the poets; that actual phenomena are but outlines—mutilated, incomplete, and blurred outlines—wretched abortions scattered here and there on Time's track, like fragments of clay, half moulded, then cast aside, lying in an artist's studio; that, after all, invisible forces and ideas, which for ever renew the actual existences, attain their fulfilment only in imaginary existences; and that the poet, in order to express nature in its entirety, is obliged to embrace in his sympathy all the ideal forms by which nature has been expressed? This is the greatness of his work; he has succeeded in seizing beauty in its fulness, because he cared for nothing but beauty.

The reader will feel that such a poem cannot be recounted. In fact, there are six poems, each of a dozen cantos, in which the action is ever diverging and converging again, becoming confused and starting again; and all the imaginations of antiquity and of the middle-age are, I believe, combined in it. The knight 'pricks along the plaine,' among the trees, and at a crossing of the paths meets other knights with whom he engages in combat; suddenly from within a cave appears a monster, half woman and half serpent, surrounded by a hideous offspring; further on a giant, with three bodies; then a dragon, great as a hill, with sharp talons and vast wings. For three days he fights him, and twice overthrown, he comes to himself only by aid of 'a gracious ointment.' After that there are savage tribes to be conquered, castles surrounded by flames to be captured. Meanwhile ladies are wandering in the midst of forests, on white palfreys, exposed to the assaults of miscreants, now guarded by a lion which follows them, now delivered by a band of satyrs who adore them. Magicians work manifold charms; palaces display their festivities; tilt-yards furnish tournaments; sea-gods, nymphs, fairies, kings, mingle feasts, surprises, dangers.

You will say it is a phantasmagoria. What matter, if we see it? And we do see it, for Spenser does. His sincerity wins us over. He is so much at home in this world, that we end by finding ourselves at home in it. He has no appearance of astonishment at astonishing events; he comes upon them so naturally, that he makes them natural; he defeats the miscreants, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Venus, Diana, and the old deities, dwell by his threshold, and enter, and he takes no notice of them. His serenity becomes ours. We grow credulous and happy by contagion, and to the same extent as he. How could it be otherwise? Is it possible to refuse credence to a man who paints things for us with so just a detail and in so lively colours? Here he describes a forest for you on a sudden; are you not instantly in it with him? Beech trees with their silvery stems, 'loftie trees iclad with sommers pride, did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide;' rays of light tremble on the bark and shine on the ground, on the reddening ferns and low bushes, which, suddenly smitten with the luminous track, glisten and glimmer. Footsteps are scarcely heard on the thick beds of heaped leaves; and at distant intervals, on the tall herbage, drops of dew are sparkling. Yet the sound of a horn reaches us through the foliage; how sweetly it falls on the ear, with what unlooked for cheer in this vast silence! It resounds more loudly; the clatter of a hunt draws near; 'eft through the thicke they heard one rudely rush;' a nymph approaches, the most chaste and beautiful in the world. Spenser sees her; more, he kneels before her:

> 'Her face so faire, as flesh it seemed not,
> But hevenly pourtraict of bright angels hew,
> Cleare as the skye, withouten blame or blot,
> Through goodly mixture of complexions dew;

And in her cheekes the vermeill red did shew
Like roses in a bed of lillies shed,
The which ambrosiall odours from them threw,
And gazers sence with double pleasure fed,
Hable to heale the sicke and to revive the ded.

In her faire eyes two living lamps did flame,
Kindled above at th' Hevenly Makers light,
And darted fyrie beames out of the same,
So passing persant, and so wondrous bright,
That quite bereav'd the rash beholders sight:
In them the blinded god his lustfull fyre
To kindle oft assayd, but had no might;
For, with dredd maiestie and awfull yre,
She broke his wanton darts, and quenched bace desyre.

Her yvorie forhead, full of bountie brave,
Like a broad table did itselfe dispred,
For Love his loftie triumphes to engrave,
And write the battailes of his great godhed:
All good and honour might therein be red;
For there their dwelling was. And, when she spake,
Sweete wordes, like dropping honny, she did shed;
And 'twixt the perles and rubins softly brake
A silver sound, that heavenly musicke seemd to make.

Upon her eyelids many Graces sate,
Under the shadow of her even browes,
Working belgardes and amorous retrate;
And everie one her with a grace endowes,
And everie one with meekenesse to her bowes:
So glorious mirrhour of celestiall grace,
And soveraine moniment of mortall vowes,
How shall frayle pen descrive her heavenly face,
For feare, through want of skill, her beauty to disgrace!

So faire, and thousand thousand times more faire,
She seemd, when she presented was to sight;
And was yclad, for heat of scorching aire,
All in a silken Camus lilly whight,
Purfled upon with many a folded plight,
Which all above besprinckled was throughout
With golden aygulets, that glistred bright,
Like twinckling starres; and all the skirt about
Was hemd with golden fringe.

Below her ham her weed did somewhat trayne,
And her streight legs most bravely were embayld
In gilden buskins of costly cordwayne,
All bard with golden bendes, which were entayld
With curious antickes, and full fayre aumayld:
Before, they fastned were under her knee
In a rich iewell, and therein entrayld
The ends of all the knots, that none might see
How they within their fouldings close enwrapped bee.

Like two faire marble pillours they were seene,
Which doe the temple of the gods support,
Whom all the people decke with girlands greene,
And honour in their festivall resort;
Those same with stately grace and princely port
She taught to tread, when she herselfe would grace;
But with the woody nymphes when she did play,
Or when the flying libbard she did chace,
She could them nimbly move, and after fly apace.

And in her hand a sharpe bore-speare she held,
And at her backe a bow and quiver gay,
Stuft with steel-headed dartes wherewith she queld
The salvage beastes in her victorious play,
Knit with a golden bauldricke which forelay
Athwart her snowy brest, and did divide
Her daintie paps; which, like young fruit in May,
Now little gan to swell, and being tide
Through her thin weed their places only signifide.

Her yellow lockes, crisped like golden wyre,
About her shoulders weren loosely shed,
And, when the winde emongst them did inspyre,
They waved like a penon wyde dispred,
And low behinde her backe were scattered:
And, whether art it were or heedlesse hap,
As through the flouring forrest rash she fled,
In her rude heares sweet flowres themselves did lap,
And flourishing fresh leaves and blossomes did enwrap.'[1]

'The daintie rose, the daughter of her morne,
More deare than life she tendered, whose flowre
The girlond of her honour did adorne:
Ne suffred she the middayes scorching powre,
Ne the sharp northerne wind thereon to showre;
But lapped up her silken leaves most chayre,
Whenso the froward skye began to lowre;
But, soone as calmed was the cristall ayre,
She did it fayre dispred, and let to florish fayre.'[2]

He is on his knees before her, I repeat, as a child on Corpus Christi day, among flowers and perfumes, transported with admiration, so that he sees a heavenly light in her eyes, and angel's tints on her cheeks, even impressing into her service Christian angels and pagan graces to adorn and wait upon her; it is love which brings such visions before him:

'Sweet love, that doth his golden wings embay
In blessed nectar and pure pleasures well.'

Whence this perfect beauty, this modest and charming dawn, in which he assembles all the brightness, all the sweetness, all the virgin

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, ii. c. 3, st. 22–30. [2] *Ibid.* iii. c. 5, st. 51.

graces of the full morning? What mother begat her, what marvellous birth brought to light such a wonder of grace and purity? One day, in a fresh, solitary fountain, where the sunbeams shone, Chrysogone was bathing amid the roses and violets.

'It was upon a sommers shinie day,
When Titan faire his beamës did display,
In a fresh fountaine, far from all mens vew,
She bath'd her brest the boyling heat t' allay;
She bath'd with roses red and violets blew,
And all the sweetest flowers that in the forrest grew.
Till faint through yrkesome wearines adowne
Upon the grassy ground herselfe she layd
To sleepe, the whiles a gentle slombring swowne
Upon her fell all naked bare displayd.'[1]

The beams played upon her body, and 'fructified' her. The months rolled on. Troubled and ashamed, she went into the 'wildernesse,' and sat down, 'every sence with sorrow sore oppprest.' Meanwhile Venus, searching for her boy Cupid, who had mutinied and fled from her, 'wandered in the world.' She had sought him in courts, cities, cottages, promising 'kisses sweet, and sweeter things, unto the man that of him tydings to her brings.'

'Shortly unto the wastefull woods she came,
Whereas she found the goddesse (Diana) with her crew,
After late chace of their embrewed game,
Sitting beside a fountaine in a rew;
Some of them washing with the liquid dew
From off their dainty limbs the dusty sweat
And soyle, which did deforme their lively hew;
Others lay shaded from the scorching heat;
The rest upon her person gave attendance great.
She, having hong upon a bough on high
Her bow and painted quiver, had unlaste
Her silver buskins from her nimble thigh,
And her lanck loynes ungirt, and brests unbraste,
After her heat the breathing cold to taste;
Her golden lockes, that late in tresses bright
Embreaded were for hindring of her haste,
Now loose about her shoulders hong undight,
And were with sweet Ambrosia all besprinckled light.'[2]

Diana, surprised thus, repulses Venus, 'and gan to smile, in scorne of her vaine playnt,' swearing that if she should catch Cupid, she would clip his wanton wings. Then she took pity on the afflicted goddess, and set herself with her to look for the fugitive. They came to the 'shady covert' where Chrysogone, in her sleep, had given birth 'unwares' to two lovely girls, 'as faire as springing day.' Diana took one, and made her

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, iii. c. 6, st. 6 and 7. [2] *Ibid.* st. 17 and 18.

the purest of all virgins. Venus carried off the other to the garden of Adonis, 'the first seminary of all things, that are borne to live and dye;' where Psyche, the bride of Love, disports herself; where Pleasure, their daughter, wantons with the Graces; where Adonis, 'lapped in flowres and pretious spycery,' 'liveth in eternal bliss,' and came back to life through the breath of immortal Love. She brought her up as her daughter, selected her to be the most faithful of loves, and after long trials, gave her hand to the good knight Sir Scudamore.

That is the kind of thing we meet with in the wondrous forest. Are you sick of it, and do you wish to leave it because it is wondrous? At every bend in the alley, at every change of the day, a stanza, a word, reveals a landscape or an apparition. It is morning, the white dawn gleams faintly through the trees; the bluish vapours roll like a veil at the horizon, and vanish in the smiling air; the springs tremble and murmur faintly amongst the mosses, and on high the poplar leaves begin to stir and flutter like the wings of butterflies. A knight alights from his horse, a valiant knight, who has unhorsed many a Saracen, and experienced many an adventure. He unlaces his helmet, and on a sudden you perceive the very cheeks of a young girl:

> 'Which doft, her golden lockes, that were upbound
> Still in a knot, unto her heeles downe traced,
> And like a silken veile in compasse round
> About her backe and all her bodie wound:
> Like as the shining skie in summers night,
> What time the dayes with scorching heat abound,
> Is creasted all with lines of firie light,
> That it prodigious seemes in common peoples sight.'[1]

It is Britomart, a virgin and a heroine, like Clorinda or Marfisa,[2] but how much more ideal! The genuine sentiment of nature, sincerity of fancy, ever-flowing fertility of inspiration, the German gravity, reanimate classical or chivalrous conceptions, which have the oldest and most trite appearance. The train of splendours and of scenery never ends. Desolate promontories, cleft with gaping chasms; thunder-stricken and blackened masses of rocks, against which the hoarse breakers dash; palaces sparkling with gold, wherein ladies, like angels, reclining carelessly on purple cushions, listen with sweet smiles to the harmony of music played by unseen hands; lofty silent walks, where avenues of oaks spread their motionless shadows over tufts of virgin violets, and turf which never mortal foot has trod;—to all these beauties of art and nature he adds the marvels of mythology, and describes them with as much of love and of full credence as a painter of

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, iv. c. 1, st. 13.

[2] Clorinda, the heroine of the infidel army in Tasso's epic poem *Jerusalem Delivered;* Marfisa, an Indian queen, who figures in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and also in Boyardo's *Orlando Innamorato*.—TR.

the Renaissance or an ancient poet. Here approach on chariots of shell, Cymoent and her nymphs:

'A teme of dolphins raunged in aray
Drew the smooth charett of sad Cymoënt;
They were all taught by Triton to obay
To the long raynes at her commaundëment:
As swifte as swallowes on the waves they went,
That their brode flaggy finnes no fome did reare,
Ne bubling rowndell they behinde them sent;
The rest, of other fishes drawen weare;
Which with their finny oars the swelling sea did sheare.'[1]

Nothing, again, can be sweeter or calmer than the description of the palace of Morpheus:

'He, making speedy way through spersed ayre,
And through the world of waters wide and deepe,
To Morpheus house doth hastily repaire.
Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,
And low, where dawning day doth never peepe,
His dwelling is; there Tethys his wet bed
Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steepe
In silver deaw his ever-drouping hed,
Whiles sad Night over him her mantle black doth spred.
And, more to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever-drizzling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
As still are wont t' annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard: but careless Quiet lyes,
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enimyes.'[2]

Observe also in a corner of this forest, a band of satyrs dancing under the green leaves. They come leaping like wanton kids, as gay as birds of joyous spring. The fair Hellenore, whom they have chosen for 'May-lady,' 'daunst lively' also, laughing, and 'with girlonds all bespredd.' The wood re-echoes the sound of their 'merry pypes.' 'Their horned feet the greene gras wore.' 'All day they daunced with great lustyhedd,' with sudden motions and suggestive looks, while about them their flock feed on 'the brouzes' at their pleasure. In every book we see strange processions pass by, allegorical and picturesque shows, like those which were then displayed at the courts of princes; now a masquerade of Cupid, now of the Rivers, now of the Months, now of the Vices. Imagination was never more prodigal or inventive. Proud Lucifera advances on a chariot 'adorned all with gold and girlonds gay,' beaming like the dawn, surrounded by a crowd

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, iii. c. 4, st. 33. [2] *Ibid.* i. c. 1, st. 39 and 41.

of courtiers whom she dazzles with her glory and splendour: 'six unequall beasts' draw her along, and each of these is ridden by a Vice. One 'upon a slouthfull asse . . . in habit blacke . . . like to an holy monck,' sick for very idleness, lets his heavy head droop, and holds in his hand a breviary which he does not read; another, on 'a filthie swyne,' crawls by in his deformity, 'his belly . . . upblowne with luxury, and eke with fatnesse swollen were his eyne; and like a crane his necke was long and fyne,' drest in vine-leaves, through which one can see his body eaten by ulcers, and vomiting along the road the wine and flesh with which he is glutted. Another, seated between 'two iron coffers,' 'upon a camell loaden all with gold,' is handling a heap of coin, with thread-bare coat, hollow cheeks, and feet stiff with gout; another 'upon a ravenous wolfe still did chaw between his cankred teeth a venemous tode, that all the poison ran about his chaw,' and his discoloured garment 'ypainted full of eies,' conceals a snake wound about his body. The last, covered with a torn and bloody robe, comes riding on a lion, brandishing about his head 'a burning brond,' his eyes sparkling, his face pale as ashes, grasping in his feverish hand the haft of his dagger. The strange and terrible procession passes on, led by the solemn harmony of the stanzas; and the grand music of reiterated rhymes sustains the imagination in this fantastic world, which, with its mingled horrors and splendours, has just been opened to its flight.

Yet all this is little. However much mythology and chivalry can supply, they do not suffice for the needs of this poetical fancy. Spenser's characteristic is the vastness and the overflow of picturesque invention. Like Rubens, he creates whole scenes, beyond the region of all traditions, to express distinct ideas. As with Rubens, his allegory swells its proportions beyond all rule, and withdraws fancy from all law, except in so far as it is necessary to harmonise forms and colours. For, if ordinary spirits receive from allegory a certain oppression, lofty imaginations receive wings which carry them aloft. Rescued by it from the common conditions of life, they can dare all things, beyond imitation, apart from probability, with no other guide but their inborn energy and their shadowy instincts. For three days Sir Guyon is led by the cursed spirit, the tempter Mammon, in the subterranean realm, across wonderful gardens, trees laden with golden fruits, glittering palaces, and a confusion of all worldly treasures. They have descended into the bowels of the earth, and pass through caverns, unknown abysses, silent depths. 'An ugly Feend . . . with monstrous stalke behind him stept,' without his knowledge, ready to devour him on the least show of covetousness. The brilliancy of the gold lights up the hideous figures, and the beaming metal shines with a beauty more seductive in the gloom of the infernal prison.

> 'That Houses forme within was rude and strong,
> Lyke an huge cave hewne out of rocky clifte,

From whose rough vaut the ragged breaches hong
Embost with massy gold of glorious guifte,
And with rich metall loaded every rifte,
That heavy ruine they did seeme to threatt;
And over them Arachne high did lifte
Her cunning web, and spred her subtile nett,
Enwrapped in fowle smoke and clouds more black than iett.

Both roofe, and floore, and walls, were all of gold,
But overgrowne with dust and old decay,
And hid in darknes, that none could behold
The hew thereof; for vew of cherefull day
Did never in that House itselfe display,
But a faint shadow of uncertein light;
Such as a lamp, whose life does fade away;
Or as the moone, cloathed with clowdy night,
Does shew to him that walkes in feare and sad affright.

In all that rowme was nothing to be seene
But huge great yron chests and coffers strong,
All bard with double bends, that none could weene
Them to enforce by violence or wrong;
On every side they placed were along.
But all the grownd with sculs was scattered
And dead mens bones, which round about were flong;
Whose lives, it seemed, whilome there were shed,
And their vile carcases now left unburied. . . .

Thence, forward he him ledd and shortly brought
Unto another rowme, whose dore forthright
To him did open as it had beene taught:
Therein an hundred raunges weren pight,
And hundred fournaces all burning bright;
By every fournace many Feends did byde,
Deformed creatures, horrible in sight;
And every Feend his busie paines applyde
To melt the golden metall, ready to be tryde.

One with great bellowes gathered filling ayre,
And with forst wind the fewell did inflame;
Another did the dying bronds repayre
With yron tongs, and sprinckled ofte the same
With liquid waves, fiers Vulcans rage to tame,
Who, maystring them, renewd his former heat:
Some scumd the drosse that from the metall came;
Some stird the molten owre with ladles great:
And every one did swincke, and every one did sweat . . .

He brought him, through a darksom narrow strayt,
To a broad gate all built of beaten gold:
The gate was open; but therein did wayt
A sturdie Villein, stryding stiffe and bold,

As if the Highest God defy he would:
In his right hand an yron club he held,
But he himselfe was all of golden mould,
Yet had both life and sence, and well could weld
That cursed weapon, when his cruell foes he queld . . .

He brought him in. The rowme was large and wyde,
As it some gyeld or solemne temple weare;
Many great golden pillours did upbeare
The massy roofe, and riches huge sustayne;
And every pillour decked was full deare
With crownes, and diademes, and titles vaine,
Which mortall princes wore whiles they on earth did rayne.

A route of people there assembled were,
Of every sort and nation under skye,
Which with great uprore preaced to draw nere
To th' upper part, where was advaunced hye
A stately siege of soveraine maiestye;
And thereon satt a Woman gorgeous gay,
And richly cladd in robes of royaltye,
That never earthly prince in such aray
His glory did enhaunce, and pompous pryde display . . .

There, as in glistring glory she did sitt,
She held a great gold chaine ylincked well,
Whose upper end to highest heven was knitt,
And lower part did reach to lowest hell.'[1]

No artist's dream matches these visions: the glowing of the furnace under the vaults of the cavern, the lights flickering over the crowded figures, the throne, and the strange glitter of the gold shining in every direction through the darkness. The allegory assumes gigantic proportions. When the object is to show Temperance at issue with temptations, Spenser deems it necessary to mass all the temptations together. He is treating of a general virtue; and as such a virtue is capable of every sort of resistance, he requires from it every sort of resistance at one time;—after the test of gold, that of pleasure. Thus the grandest and the most exquisite spectacles follow and are contrasted with each other supernaturally; the graceful and the terrible side by side,—the happy gardens side by side with the cursed subterranean cavern.

'No gate, but like one, being goodly dight
With bowes and braunches, which did broad dilate
Their clasping armes in wanton wreathings intricate:

So fashioned a porch with rare device,
Archt over head with an embracing vine,
Whose bounches hanging downe seemd to entice
All passers-by to taste their lushious wine,

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, ii. c. 7, st. 28-46.

And did themselves into their hands incline,
As freely offering to be gathered;
Some deepe empurpled as the hyacine,
Some as the rubine laughing sweetely red,
Some like faire emeraudes, not yet well ripened. . . .

And in the midst of all a fountaine stood,
Of richest substance that on earth might bee,
So pure and shiny that the silver flood
Through every channell running one might see;
Most goodly it with curious ymageree
Was over-wrought, and shapes of naked boyes,
Of which some seemd with lively iollitee
To fly about, playing their wanton toyes,
Whylest others did themselves embay in liquid ioyes.

And over all of purest gold was spred
A trayle of yvie in his native hew;
For the rich metall was so coloured,
That wight, who did not well avis'd it vew,
Would surely deeme it to bee yvie trew:
Low his lascivious armes adown did creepe,
That themselves dipping in the silver dew
Their fleecy flowres they fearfully did steepe,
Which drops of christall seemd for wantones to weep.

Infinit streames continually did well
Out of this fountaine, sweet and faire to see,
The which into an ample laver fell,
And shortly grew to so great quantitie,
That like a little lake it seemd to bee;
Whose depth exceeded not three cubits hight,
That through the waves one might the bottom see,
All pav'd beneath with jaspar shining bright,
That seemd the fountaine in that sea did sayle upright. . . .

The ioyous birdes, shrouded in chearefull shade,
Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet;
Th' angelicall soft trembling voyces made
To th' instruments divine respondence meet;
The silver-sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmure of the waters fall;
The waters fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all. . . .

Upon a bed of roses she was layd,
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
And was arayd, or rather disarayd,
All in a vele of silke and silver thin,
That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
But rather shewd more white, if more might bee:
More subtile web Arachne cannot spin;
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched deaw, do not in th' ayre more lightly flee.

Her snowy brest was bare to ready spoyle
Of hungry eies, which n' ote therewith be fild;
And yet, through languour of her late sweet toyle,
Few drops, more cleare then nectar, forth distild,
That like pure orient perles adowne it trild;
And her faire eyes, sweet smyling in delight,
Moystened their fierie beames, with which she thrild
Fraile harts, yet quenched not; like starry light,
Which, sparckling on the silent waves, does seeme more bright.'[1]

Is not this a fairy land? We find here finished pictures, genuine and complete, composed with a painter's feeling, with choice of tints and lines; our eyes are delighted by it. This reclining Acrasia has the pose of a goddess, or of one of Titian's courtesans. An Italian artist might copy these gardens, flowing waters, sculptured loves, wreaths of creeping ivy thick with glossy leaves and fleecy flowers. Just before, in the infernal depths, the lights, with their long streaming rays, were fine, half-smothered by the darkness; the lofty throne in the vast hall, between the pillars, in the midst of a swarming multitude, connected all the forms around it by centring all regards. The poet, here and throughout, is a colourist and an architect. However fantastic his world may be, it is not factitious; if it is not, it might have been; indeed, it should have been; it is the fault of circumstances if they do not dispose themselves so as to bring this to pass; taken by itself, it possesses that internal harmony by which a real thing, even a still higher harmony, comes into existence, inasmuch as, amid the differences of real things, it is altogether, and in its least detail, constructed with a view to beauty. Art is matured: this is the great characteristic of the age, which distinguishes this poem from all similar tales heaped up by the middle-age. Incoherent, mutilated, they lay like rubbish, or rough-hewn stones, which the weak hands of the trouvères could not build into a monument. At last the poets and artists are here, and with them the conception of beauty, to wit, the idea of the general effect. They understand proportions, relations, contrasts; they compose. In their hands the misty vague sketch becomes defined, complete, separate; it assumes colour—is made a picture. Every object thus conceived and imaged acquires a definite existence as soon as it acquires a true form; centuries after, it will be acknowledged and admired, and men will be touched by it; and more, they will be touched by its author; for, besides the object which he paints, the poet paints himself. His ruling idea is stamped upon the work which it produces and controls. Spenser is superior to his subject, comprehends it fully, frames it with a view to the end, in order to impress upon it the proper mark of his soul and his genius. Each story is modified with respect to another, and all with respect to a certain effect

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, ii. c. 12, st. 53–78.

which is being worked out. Thus a beauty issues from this harmony, —the beauty in the poet's heart,—which his whole work strives to express; a noble and yet a laughing beauty, made up of moral elevation and sensuous seductions, English in sentiment, Italian in externals, chivalric in subject, modern in its perfection, representing a unique and admirable epoch, the appearance of paganism in a Christian race, and the worship of form by an imagination of the North.

3. Prose.

I.

Such an epoch can scarcely last, and the poetic vitality expends itself in a blossom of prose, so that its expansion leads to its decline. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, the enfeeblement of manners and genius grows apparent. Enthusiasm and respect decline. The minions and sycophants of the court intrigue and pilfer, amid pedantry, puerility, and show. The court plunders, and the nation murmurs. The Commons begin to show a stern front, and the king, scolding them like a schoolmaster, bends before them like a little boy. This pitiable monarch (James I.) suffers himself to be bullied by his favourites, writes to them like a gossip, calls himself a Solomon, airs his literary vanity, and in granting an audience to a courtier, holds up to him his own reputation as a savant, and expects to be answered in the same strain. The dignity of the government is weakened, and the people's loyalty is cooled. Royalty declines, and revolution is fostered. At the same time, the noble chivalric paganism degenerates into a base and coarse sensuality. The king, we are told, on one occasion, had got so drunk with his royal brother Christian of Denmark, that they both had to be carried to bed. Sir John Harrington says:

'The ladies abandon their sobriety, and are seen to roll about in intoxication. . . . The Lady who did play the Queen's part (in the Masque of the Queen of Sheba) did carry most precious gifts to both their Majesties; but, forgetting the steppes arising to the canopy, overset her caskets into his Danish Majesties lap, and fell at his feet, tho I rather think it was in his face. Much was the hurry and confusion; cloths and napkins were at hand, to make all clean. His Majesty then got up and would dance with the Queen of Sheba; but he fell down and humbled himself before her, and was carried to an inner chamber and laid on a bed of state; which was not a little defiled with the presents of the Queen which had been bestowed on his garments; such as wine, cream, jelly, beverage, cakes, spices, and other good matters. The entertainment and show went forward, and most of the presenters went backward, or fell down; wine did so occupy their upper chambers. Now did appear, in rich dress, Hope, Faith, and Charity: Hope did assay to speak, but wine rendered her endeavours so feeble that she withdrew, and hoped the king would excuse her brevity: Faith . . . left the court in a staggering condition. . . . They were both sick and spewing in the lower hall. Next came Victory, who . . . by a strange medley of versification

. . . and after much lamentable utterance, was led away like a silly captive, and laid to sleep in the outer steps of the anti-chamber. As for Peace, she most rudely made war with her olive branch, and laid on the pates of those who did oppose her coming. I ne'er did see such lack of good order, discretion, and sobriety in our Queen's days.'[1]

Observe that these tipsy women were great ladies. The reason is, that the grand ideas which introduce an epoch, end, in their exhaustion, by preserving nothing but their vices; the proud sentiment of natural life becomes a vulgar appeal to the senses. An entrance, an arch of triumph under James I., often represented obscenities; and later, when the sensual instincts, exaggerated by Puritan tyranny, begin to raise their heads once more, we shall find under the Restoration, excess revelling in its debauchery, and triumphing in its shame.

Meanwhile the literature undergoes a change; the powerful breeze which had guided it, and which, amidst singularity, refinements, exaggerations, had made it great, slackened and diminished. With Carew, Suckling, and Herrick, prettiness takes the place of the beautiful. That which strikes them is no longer the general features of things; that which they try to express is no longer the inner character of things. They no longer possess that liberal conception, that instinctive penetration, by which man sympathised with objects, and grew capable of creating them anew. They no longer boast of that overflow of emotions, that excess of ideas and images, which compelled a man to relieve himself by words, to act externally, to represent freely and boldly the interior drama which made his whole body and heart tremble. They are rather wits of the court, cavaliers of fashion, who wish to try their hand at imagination and style. In their hands love becomes gallantry; they write songs, fugitive pieces, compliments to the ladies. Do their hearts still prick them? They turn eloquent phrases in order to be applauded, and flattering exaggerations in order to please. The divine faces, the serious or profound looks, the virgin or impassioned expressions which burst forth at every step in the early poets, have disappeared; here we see nothing but agreeable countenances, painted in agreeable verses. Blackguardism is not far off; we meet with it as early as in Suckling, and crudity to boot, and prosaic epicurism; their sentiment is expressed before long, in such a phrase as: 'Let us amuse ourselves, and a fig for the rest.' The only objects they can paint, at last, are little graceful things, a kiss, a May-day festivity, a dewy primrose, a marriage morning, a bee.[2] Herrick and Suckling especially produce little exquisite poems, delicate, ever laughing or smiling like those attributed to Anacreon,

[1] *Nugæ Antiquæ*, i. 349 *et passim*.

[2] 'Some asked me where the Rubies grew,
And nothing I did say;
But with my finger pointed to
The lips of Julia.

or those which abound in the *Anthology*. In fact, here, as at the time alluded to, we are at the decline of paganism; energy departs, the reign of the agreeable begins. People do not relinquish the worship of beauty and pleasure, but dally with them. They deck and fit them to their taste; they cease to subdue and bend men, who sport and amuse themselves with them. It is the last beam of a setting sun; the genuine poetic sentiment dies out with Sedley, Waller, and the rhymesters of the Restoration; they write prose in verse; their heart is on a level with their style, and with an exact language we find the commencement of a new age and a new art.

Side by side with prettiness comes affectation; it is the second mark of the decadence. Instead of writing to say things, they write to say them well; they outbid their neighbours, and strain every mode of speech: they push art over on the side to which it had a leaning; and as in this age it had a leaning towards vehemence and imagination,

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Some ask'd how Pearls did grow, and where;
Then spake I to my girle,
To part her lips, and shew me there
The quarelets of Pearl.
One ask'd me where the roses grew;
I bade him not go seek;
But forthwith bade my Julia show
A bud in either cheek.'

HERRICK'S *Hesperides*, ed. Walford, *1859*; *The Rock of Rubies*, p. 32.

'About the sweet bag of a bee,
Two Cupids fell at odds;
And whose the pretty prize shu'd be,
They vow'd to ask the Gods.
Which Venus hearing, thither came,
And for their boldness stript them;
And taking thence from each his flame,
With rods of mirtle whipt them.
Which done, to still their wanton cries,
When quiet grown sh'ad seen them,
She kist and wip'd their dove-like eyes,
And gave the bag between them.'

HERRICK, *Ibid.*; *The Bag of the Bee*, p. 41.

'Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prithee, why so pale?
Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
Prithee, why so mute?
Will, when speaking well can't win her,
Saying nothing do't?
Prithee, why so mute?

they pile up their emphasis and colouring. A jargon always springs out of a style. In all arts, the first masters, the inventors, discover the idea, steep themselves in it, and leave it to effect its outward form. Then come the second class, the imitators, who sedulously repeat this form, and alter it by exaggeration. Some nevertheless have talent, as Quarles, Herbert, Babington, Donne in particular, a pungent satirist, of terrible crudeness,[1] a powerful poet, of a precise and intense imagination, who still preserves something of the energy and thrill of the original inspiration.[2] But he deliberately abuses all these gifts, and

Quit, quit for shame: this will not move,
This cannot take her;
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her.
The devil take her!'

Sir JOHN SUCKLING'S *Works*, ed. A. Suckling, 1836, p. 70.

'As when a lady, walking Flora's bower,
Picks here a pink, and there a gilly-flower,
Now plucks a violet from her purple bed,
And then a primrose, the year's maidenhead,
There nips the brier, here the lover's pansy,
Shifting her dainty pleasures with her fancy;
This on her arms, and that she lists to wear
Upon the borders of her curious hair;
At length a rose-bud (passing all the rest)
She plucks, and bosoms in her lily breast.'

QUARLES, Chalmers' *Cyclopædia of Engl. Lit.* i. 140.

[1] See in particular, his satire against the courtiers. The following is against imitators:

'But he is worst, who (beggarly) doth chaw
Other's wits fruits, and *in his ravenous maw*
Rankly digested, *doth those things outspue,*
As his owne *things*; and *they are his owne, 'tis true,*
For if one eate *my meate, though it be knowne*
The meat was mine, th' excrement *is his owne.*'

DONNE'S *Satires*, *1639*. *Satire ii.* p. *128.*

[2] 'When I behold a stream, which from the spring
Doth with doubtful melodious murmuring,
Or in a speechless slumber calmly ride
Her wedded channel's bosom, and there chide
And bend her brows, and swell, if any bough
Does but stoop down to kiss her utmost brow;
Yet if her often gnawing kisses win
The traiterous banks to gape and let her in,
She rusheth violently and doth divorce
Her from her native and her long-kept course,
And roares, and braves it, and in gallant scorn
In flatt'ring eddies promising return,
She flouts her channel, which thenceforth is dry,
Then say I: That is she, and this am I.'

succeeds with great difficulty in concocting a piece of nonsense. For instance, the impassioned poets had said to their mistress, that if they lost her, they should hate all other women. Donne, in order to eclipse them, says:

'O do not die, for I shall hate
All women so, when thou art gone,
That thee I shall not celebrate
When I remember thou wast one.'[1]

Twenty times while reading him we rub our brow, and ask with astonishment, how a man could so have tormented and contorted himself, strained his style, refined on his refinement, hit upon such absurd comparisons? But this was the spirit of the age; they made an effort to be ingeniously absurd. A flea had bitten Donne and his mistress. He says:

'This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed and mariage temple is.
Though Parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloyster'd in these living walls of Jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that selfe-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.'[2]

The Marquis de Mascarille[3] never found anything to equal this. Would you have believed a writer could invent such absurdities? She and he made but one, for both are but one with the flea, and so one could not be killed without the other. Observe that the wise Malherbe wrote very similar enormities, in the *Tears of St. Peter*, and that the sonneteers of Italy and Spain reach simultaneously the same height of folly, and you will agree that throughout Europe at that time they were at the close of a poetical epoch.

On this boundary line of a closing and a dawning literature a poet appeared, one of the most fanciful and illustrious of his time, Abraham Cowley,[4] a precocious child, a reader and a versifier like Pope, having known passions less than books, busied himself less about things than about words. Literary exhaustion has seldom been more manifest. He possesses all the capacity to say whatever pleases him, but he has just nothing to say. The substance has vanished, leaving in its place a hollow shadow. In vain he tries the epic, the Pindaric strophe, all kinds of stanzas, odes, little lines, long lines; in vain he calls to his assistance botanical and philosophical similes, all the erudition of the university, all the relics of antiquity, all the ideas of new science: we yawn as we read him. Except in a few descriptive verses, two or three

[1] *Poems*, 1639: *A Feaver*, p. 15. [2] *Ibid.*: *The Flea*, p. 1.

[3] A valet in Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, who apes and exaggerates his master's manners and style, and pretends to be a marquess. He also appears in *L'Etourdi* and *Le dépit Amoureux*, by the same author.—TR.

[4] 1608–1667. I refer to the eleventh edition of 1710.

graceful tendernesses,[1] he feels nothing, he speaks only; he is a poet of the brain. His collection of amorous pieces is but a vehicle for a scientific test, and serves to show that he has read the authors, that he knows his geography, that he is well versed in anatomy, that he has a dash of medicine and astronomy, that he has at his service references and allusions enough to break the head of his readers. He will speak in this wise:

'Beauty, thou active—passive Ill!
Which dy'st thyself as fast as thou dost kill!'

or will remark that his mistress is to blame for spending three hours every morning at her toilet, because

'They make that Beauty Tyranny,
That's else a Civil-government.'

After reading two hundred pages, you feel disposed to box his ears. You have to think, by way of consolation, that every age must draw to a close, that this one could not do so otherwise, that the old glow of enthusiasm, the sudden flood of rapture, images, capricious and audacious fancies, which once rolled through the mind of men, arrested now and cooled down, could only exhibit dross, a curdling scum, a multitude of brilliant and hurtful points. You say to yourself that, after all, Cowley had perhaps talent; you find that he had in fact one, a new talent, unknown to the old masters, the sign of a new culture, which needs other manners, and announces a new society. Cowley had these manners, and belongs to this society. He was a well-governed, reasonable, instructed, polished, well-trained man, who, after twelve years of service and writing in France, under Queen Henrietta, retires at last wisely into the country, where he studies natural history, and prepares a treatise on religion, philosophising on men and life, fertile in general reflections and ideas, a moralist, bidding his executor 'to let nothing stand in his writings which might seem the least in the world to be an offence against religion or good manners.' Such dispositions and such a life produce and indicate less a poet, that is, a seer, a creator, than a literary man, I mean a man who can think and speak, and who therefore ought to have read much, learnt much, written much, ought to possess a calm and clear mind, to be accustomed to polished society, sustained conversation, a sort of raillery. In fact, Cowley is an author by profession, the oldest of those who in England deserve the name. His prose is as easy and sensible as his poetry is contorted and unreasonable. A polished man, writing for polished men, pretty much as he would speak to them in a drawing-room,—this I take to be the idea which they had of a good author in the seventeenth century. It is the idea which Cowley's Essays leave of his character; it is the kind of talent which the writers of the coming age take for their model; and

[1] *The Spring* (*The Mistress*, i. 72).

he is the first of that grave and amiable group which, continued in Temple, reaches so far as to include Addison.

II.

Having reached this point, the Renaissance seemed to have attained its limit, and, like a drooping and faded flower, to be ready to leave its place for a new bud which began to rise from the ruins. At all events, a living and unexpected shoot sprang from the old declining stock. At the moment when art languished, science shot forth; the whole labour of the age ended in this. The fruits are not unlike; on the contrary, they come from the same sap, and by the diversity of the shape only manifest two distinct periods of the inner growth which has produced them. Every art ends in a science, and every poetry in a philosophy. For science and philosophy do but translate in precise formulas the original conception which art and poetry render sensible by imaginary figures: when once the idea of an epoch is manifested in verse by ideal creations, it naturally comes to be expressed in prose by positive arguments. That which had struck men on escaping from ecclesiastical oppression and monkish asceticism was the pagan idea of a life true to nature, and freely developed. They had found nature buried behind scholasticism, and they had expressed it in poems and paintings; in Italy by superb healthy corporeality, in England by vehement and unconventional spirituality, with such divination of its laws, instincts, and forms, that one might extract from their theatre and their pictures a complete theory both of soul and body. When enthusiasm is past, curiosity begins. The sentiment of beauty gives way to the sentiment of truth. The theory embraced in works of imagination is unfolded. The gaze continues fixed on nature, not to admire now, but to understand. From painting we pass to anatomy, from the drama to moral philosophy, from grand poetical divinations to great scientific views; the second continue the first, and the same spirit shows in both; for what art had represented, and science proceeds to observe, are living things, with their complex and complete structure, set in motion by their internal forces, with no supernatural intervention. Artists and savants, all set out, with no misgiving, from the master conception, to wit, that nature subsists of herself, that every existence has in its own womb the source of its action, that the causes of events are the innate laws of things; an all-powerful idea, from which was to issue the modern civilisation, and which, at the time I write of, produced in England and Italy, as before in Greece, genuine sciences, side by side with a complete art: after da Vinci and Michael Angelo, the school of anatomists, mathematicians, naturalists, ending with Galileo; after Spenser, Ben Jonson, and Shakspeare, the school of thinkers who surround Bacon and lead up to Harvey.

We have not far to look for this school. In the interregnum of Christianity the dominating bent of mind belongs to it. It was paganism

which reigned in Elizabeth's court, not only in letters, but in doctrine,—a paganism of the north, always serious, generally sombre, but which rested, like that of the south, on natural forces. From some, all Christianity was effaced; many proceed to atheism from the excess of revulsion and debauchery, like Marlowe and Greene. With others, like Shakspeare, the idea of God scarcely makes its appearance; they see in our poor short human life only a dream, and beyond it the long sad sleep: for them, death is the goal of life; at most a dark gulf, into which man plunges, uncertain of the issue. If they carry their gaze beyond, they perceive,[1] not the soul welcomed into a purer world, but the corpse abandoned to the damp earth, or the ghost hovering about the churchyard. They speak like sceptics or superstitious men, never as genuine believers. Their heroes have human, not religious virtues; against crime they rely on honour and the love for the beautiful, not on piety and the fear of God. If others, few and far, like Sidney and Spenser, catch a glimpse of this god, it is as a vague ideal light, a sublime Platonic phantom, which has no resemblance to a personal God, a strict inquisitor of the slightest motions of the heart. He appears at the summit of things, like the splendid crown of the world, but He does not weigh upon human life; He leaves it intact and free, only turning it towards the beautiful. They do not know as yet the sort of narrow prison in which official cant and respectable creeds were, later on, to confine action and intelligence. Even the believers, sincere Christians like Bacon and Browne, discard all oppressive sternness, reduce Christianity to a sort of moral poetry, and allow naturalism to subsist beneath religion. In such a broad and open channel, speculation could spread its wings. With Lord Herbert appeared a systematic deism; with Milton and Algernon Sidney, a philosophical religion; Clarendon went so far as to compare Lord Falkland's gardens to the groves of Academe. Against the rigorism of the Puritans, Chillingworth, Hales, Hooker, the greatest doctors of the English Church, give a large place to natural reason,—so large, that never, even to this day, has it made such an advance.

An astonishing irruption of facts—the discovery of America, the revival of antiquity, the restoration of philology, the invention of the arts, the development of industries, the march of human curiosity over the whole of the past and the whole of the globe—came to furnish subject-matter, and prose began its reign. Sidney, Wilson, Ascham, and Puttenham explored the rules of style; Hackluyt and Purchas compiled the cyclopædia of travel and the description of every land; Holinshed, Speed, Raleigh, Stowe, Knolles, Daniel, Thomas More, Lord Herbert, founded history; Camden, Spelman, Cotton, Usher, and Selden inaugurate scholarship; a legion of patient workers, of obscure

[1] See in Shakspeare, *The Tempest, Measure for Measure, Hamlet;* in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret,* Act iv.; Webster, *passim.*

collectors, of literary pioneers, amassed, arranged, and sifted the documents which Sir Robert Cotton and Sir Thomas Bodley stored up in their libraries; whilst utopists, moralists, painters of manners—Thomas More, Joseph Hall, John Earle, Owen Feltham, Burton—described and passed judgment on the modes of life, continued with Fuller, Sir Thomas Browne, and Isaac Walton up to the middle of the next century, and increase the number of controversialists and politicians who, with Hooker, Taylor, Chillingworth, Algernon Sidney, Harrington, study religion, society, church and state. A copious and confused fermentation, from which abundance of thoughts proceeded, but few notable books. Noble prose, such as was heard at the court of Louis XIV., in Pollio, in the schools at Athens, such as rhetorical and sociable nations know how to produce, was altogether lacking. These men had not the spirit of analysis, the art of following step by step the natural order of ideas, nor the spirit of conversation, the talent never to weary or shock others. Their imagination is too little regulated, and their manners too little polished. They who had mixed most in the world, even Sidney, speak roughly what they think, and as they think it. Instead of glossing, they exaggerate. They blurt out all, and withhold nothing. When they do not employ excessive compliments, they take to coarse pleasantries. They overlook measured charm, refined raillery, delicate flattery. They rejoice in gross puns, dirty allusions. They mistake paradoxical enigmas and grotesque images for wit. Great lords and ladies, they talk like ill-bred persons, lovers of buffoonery, of shows and bear-fights. With some, as Overbury or Sir Thomas Browne, poetry trenches so much upon prose, that it covers its narrative with images, and hides ideas under its pictures. They load their style with flowery comparisons, which produce one another as they go along, and mount one above another, so that sense disappears, and ornament only is visible. In fine, they are generally pedants, still stiff with the rust of the school; they divide and subdivide, propound theses, definitions; they argue solidly and heavily, and quote their authors in Latin, and even in Greek; they square out their massive periods, and learnedly knock their adversaries down, and their readers too, by the very rebound. They are never on the prose-level, but always above or below—above by their poetic genius, below by the weight of their education and the barbarism of their manners. But they think seriously and for themselves; they are deliberate; they are convinced and touched by what they say. Even in the compiler we find a force and loyalty of spirit, which give confidence and cause pleasure. Their writings are like the powerful and heavy engravings of their contemporaries, the maps of Hofnagel for instance, so harsh and so instructive; their conception is sharp and clear; they have the gift of perceiving every object, not under a general aspect, like the classical writers, but specially and individually. It is not man in the abstract, the citizen as he is everywhere, the countryman as such, that they

represent, but James or Thomas, Smith or Brown, of such a parish, from such an office, with such and such attitude or dress, distinct from all others; in short, they see, not the idea, but the individual. Imagine the disturbance that such a disposition produces in a man's head, how the regular order of things becomes deranged by it; how every object, with the infinite medley of its forms, properties, appendages, will thenceforth fasten itself by a hundred points of contact unforeseen to another object, and bring before the mind a series or a family; what boldness language will derive from it; what familar, picturesque, absurd words will break forth in succession; how the dash, the impromptu, the originality and inequality of invention, will stand out. Figure, at the same time, what a hold this form of mind has on objects, how many facts it condenses in one conception; what a mass of personal judgments, foreign authorities, suppositions, guesses, imaginations, it spreads over every subject; with what haphazard and creative fecundity it engenders both truth and conjecture. It is an extraordinary chaos of thoughts and forms, often abortive, still more often barbarous, sometimes grand. But from this superfluity something lasting and great is produced, namely science, and we have only to examine more closely into one or two of these works to see the new creation emerge from the blocks and the debris.

III.

Two writers above all display this state of mind. The first, Robert Burton, an ecclesiastic and university recluse, who passed his life in libraries, and dabbled in all the sciences, as learned as Rabelais, of an inexhaustible and overflowing memory; unequal, moreover, gifted with enthusiasm, and spasmodically gay, but as a rule sad and morose, to the extent of confessing in his epitaph that melancholy made up his life and his death; in the first place original, enamoured of his own intelligence, and one of the earliest models of that singular English mood which, withdrawing man within himself, develops in him, at one time imagination, at another scrupulousness, at another oddity, and makes of him, according to circumstances, a poet, an eccentric, a humorist, a madman, or a puritan. He read on for thirty years, put an encyclopædia into his head, and now, to amuse and relieve himself, takes a folio of blank paper. Twenty lines of a poet, a dozen lines of a treatise on agriculture, a folio column of heraldry, the patience, the record of the fever fits of hypochondria, the history of the particle *que*, a scrap of metaphysics,—this is what passes through his brain in a quarter of an hour: it is a carnival of ideas and phrases, Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, philosophical, geometrical, medical, poetical, astrological, musical, pedagogic, heaped one on the other; an enormous medley, a prodigious mass of jumbled quotations, jostling thoughts with the vivacity and the transport of a feast of unreason.[1]

[1] See for this feast Walter Scott's *Abbot*, chs. xiv. and xv.—TR.

'This roving humour (though not with like success) I have ever had, and, like a raging spaniel that barks at every bird he sees, leaving his game, I have followed all, saving that which I should, and may justly complain, and truly, *qui ubique est, nusquam est*, which Gesner did in modesty: that I have read many books, but to little purpose, for want of good method; I have confusedly tumbled over divers authors in our libraries with small profit, for want of art, order, memory, judgment. I never travelled but in map or card, in which my unconfined thoughts have freely expatiated, as having ever been especially delighted with the study of cosmography. Saturn was lord of my geniture, culminating, etc., and Mars principal significator of manners, in partile conjunction with mine ascendant; both fortunate in their houses, etc. I am not poor, I am not rich; *nihil est, nihil deest;* I have little, I want nothing: all my treasure is in Minerva's tower. Greater preferment as I could never get, so am I not in debt for it. I have a competency (*laus Deo*) from my noble and munificent patrons. Though I live still a collegiat student, as Democritus in his garden, and lead a monastique life, *ipse mihi theatrum*, sequestred from those tumults and troubles of the world, *et tanquam in speculâ positus* (as he said), in some high place above you all, like *Stoïcus sapiens, omnia sæcula præterita præsentiaque videns, uno velut intuitu*, I hear and see what is done abroad, how others run, ride, turmoil, and macerate themselves in court and countrey. Far from these wrangling lawsuits, *aulæ vanitatem, fori ambitionem, videre mecum soleo:* I laugh at all, only secure, lest my suit go amiss, my ships perish, corn and cattle miscarry, trade decay; I have no wife nor children, good or bad, to provide for; a mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts, which methinks are diversely presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene. I hear new news every day: and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets; spectrums, prodigies, apparitions; of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Persia, Poland, etc., daily musters and preparations, and such like, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain, monomachies, shipwracks, piracies, and sea-fights, peace, leagues, stratagems, and fresh alarms—a vast confusion of vows, wishes, actions, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances,—are daily brought to our ears: new books every day, pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues of volumes of all sorts, new paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies in philosophy, religion, etc. Now come tidings of weddings, maskings, mummeries, entertainments, jubiles, embassies, tilts and tournaments, trophies, triumphs, revels, sports, playes: then again, as in a new shifted scene, treasons, cheating tricks, robberies, enormous villanies, in all kinds, funerals, burials, death of princes, new discoveries, expeditions; now comical, then tragical matters. To-day we hear of new lords and officers created, to-morrow of some great men deposed, and then again of fresh honours conferred: one is let loose, another imprisoned: one purchaseth, another breaketh: he thrives, his neighbour turns bankrupt; now plenty, then again dearth and famine; one runs, another rides, wrangles, laughs, weeps, etc. Thus I daily hear, and such like, both private and publick news.'[1]

'For what a world of books offers itself, in all subjects, arts, and sciences, to the sweet content and capacity of the reader? In arithmetick, geometry, perspective, optick, astronomy, architecture, *sculptura*, *pictura*, of which so many and such elaborate treatises are of late written: in mechanicks and their mysteries, military matters, navigation, riding of horses, fencing, swimming, gardening,

[1] *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 12th ed. 1821, 2 vols.: Democritus to the Reader, i. 4.

planting, great tomes of husbandry, cookery, faulconry, hunting, fishing, fowling, etc., with exquisite pictures of all sports, games, and what not. In musick, metaphysicks, natural and moral philosophy, philologie, in policy, heraldry, genealogy, chronology, etc., they afford great tomes, or those studies of antiquity, etc., *et quid subtilius arithmeticis inventionibus? quid jucundius musicis rationibus? quid divinius astronomicis? quid rectius geometricis demonstrationibus?* What so sure, what so pleasant? He that shall but see the geometrical tower of Garezenda at Bologne in Italy, the steeple and clock at Strasborough, will admire the effects of art, or that engine of Archimedes to remove the earth itself, if he had but a place to fasten his instrument. *Archimedis cochlea*, and rare devises to corrivate waters, musick instruments, and trisyllable echoes again, again, and again repeated, with miriades of such. What vast tomes are extant in law, physick, and divinity, for profit, pleasure, practice, speculation, in verse or prose, etc.! Their names alone are the subject of whole volumes: we have thousands of authors of all sorts, many great libraries, full well furnished, like so many dishes of meat, served out for several palates, and he is a very block that is affected with none of them. Some take an infinite delight to study the very languages wherein these books are written—Hebrew, Greek, Syriack, Chalde, Arabick, etc. Methinks it would please any man to look upon a geographical map (*suavi animum delectatione allicere, ob incredibilem rerum varietatem et jucunditatem, et ad pleniorem sui cognitionem excitare*), chorographical, topographical delineations; to behold, as it were, all the remote provinces, towns, cities of the world, and never to go forth of the limits of his study; to measure, by the scale and compasse, their extent, distance, examine their site. Charles the Great (as Platina writes) had three faire silver tables, in one of which superficies was a large map of Constantinople, in the second Rome neatly engraved, in the third an exquisite description of the whole world; and much delight he took in them. What greater pleasure can there now be, than to view those elaborate maps of Ortelius, Mercator, Hondius, etc.? to peruse those books of cities put out by Braunus and Hogenbergius? to read those exquisite descriptions of Maginus, Munster, Herrera, Laet, Merula, Boterus, Leander Albertus, Camden, Leo Afer, Adricomius, Nic. Gerbelius, etc.? those famous expeditions of Christopher Columbus, Americus Vespucius, Marcus Polus the Venetian, Lod. Virtomannus, Aloysius Cadamustus, etc.? those accurate diaries of Portugals, Hollanders, of Bartison, Oliver a Nort, etc., Hacluit's Voyages, Pet. Martyr's Decades, Benzo, Lerius, Linschoten's relations, those Hodœporicons of Jod. a Meggea, Brocarde the Monke, Bredenbachius, Jo. Dublinius, Sands, etc., to Jerusalem, Egypt, and other remote places of the world? those pleasant itineraries of Paulus Hentzerus, Jodocus Sincerus, Dux Polonus, etc.? to read Bellonius observations, P. Gillius his survayes; those parts of America, set out, and curiously cut in pictures, by Fratres a Bry? To see a well cut herbal, hearbs, trees, flowers, plants, all vegetals, expressed in their proper colours to the life, as that of Matthiolus upon Dioscorides, Delacampius, Lobel, Bauhinus, and that last voluminous and mighty herbal of Besler of Noremberge; wherein almost every plant is to his own bignesse. To see birds, beasts, and fishes of the sea, spiders, gnats, serpents, flies, etc., all creatures set out by the same art, and truly expressed in lively colours, with an exact description of their natures, vertues, qualities, etc., as hath been accurately performed by Ælian, Gesner, Ulysses Aldrovandus, Bellonius, Rondoletius, Hippolytus Salvianus, etc.'[1]

He is never-ending; words, phrases, overflow, are heaped up, re-

[1] *Anatomy of Melancholy*, i. part 2, sec. 2, Mem. 4, p. 420 *et passim*.

peated, and flow on, carrying the reader along, deafened, wearied, half-drowned, unable to touch ground in the deluge. Burton is inexhaustible. There are no ideas which he does not iterate under fifty forms: when he has expended his own, he pours out upon us other men's—the classics, the rarest authors, known only by savants—authors rarer still, known only to the learned; he borrows from all. Underneath these deep caverns of erudition and science, there is one blacker and more unknown than all the others, filled with forgotten authors, with crack-jaw names, Besler of Nuremberg, Adricomius, Linschoten, Brocarde, Bredenbachius. Amidst all these antediluvian monsters, bristling with Latin terminations, he is at his ease; he sports with them, laughs, skips from one to the other, drives them all at once. He is like old Proteus, the bold runner, who in one hour, with his team of hippopotami, makes the circuit of the ocean.

What subject does he take? Melancholy, his individual mood; and he takes it like a schoolman. None of St. Thomas' treatises is more regularly constructed than his. This torrent of erudition is distributed in geometrically planned channels, turning off at right angles without deviating by a line. At the head of every part you will find a synoptical and analytical table, with hyphens, brackets, each division begetting its subdivisions, each subdivision its sections, each section its subsections: of the malady in general, of melancholy in particular, of its nature, its seat, its varieties, causes, symptoms, its prognosis; of its cure by permissible means, by forbidden means, by dietetic means, by pharmaceutical means. After the scholastic process, he descends from the general to the particular, and disposes each emotion and idea in its labelled case. In this framework, supplied by the middle-age, he heaps up the whole, like a man of the Renaissance,—the literary description of passions and the medical description of mental alienation, details of the hospital with a satire on human follies, physiological treatises side by side with personal confidences, the recipes of the apothecary with moral counsels, remarks on love with the history of evacuations. The discrimination of ideas has not yet been effected; doctor and poet, man of letters and savant, he is all at once; for want of dams, ideas pour like different liquids into the same vat, with strange spluttering and bubbling, with an unsavoury smell and odd effect. But the vat is full, and from this admixture are produced potent compounds which no preceding age had known.

IV.

For in this mixture there is an effectual leaven, the poetic sentiment, which stirs up and animates the vast erudition, which will not be confined to dry catalogues; which, interpreting every fact, every object, disentangles or divines a mysterious soul within it, and agitates the whole spirit of man, by representing to him the restless world within and without him as a grand enigma. Let us conceive a kindred

spirit to Shakspeare's; a scholar and an observer instead of an actor and a poet, who in place of creating is occupied in comprehending, but who, like Shakspeare, applies himself to living things, penetrates their internal structure, puts himself in communication with their actual laws, imprints in himself fervently and scrupulously the smallest details of their figure; who at the same time extends his penetrating surmises beyond the region of observation, discerns behind visible phænomena a world obscure yet sublime, and trembles with a kind of veneration before the vast, indistinct, but populous abyss on whose surface our little universe hangs quivering. Such a one is Sir Thomas Browne, a naturalist, a philosopher, a scholar, a physician, and a moralist, almost the last of the generation which produced Jeremy Taylor and Shakspeare. No thinker bears stronger witness to the wandering and inventive curiosity of the age. No writer has better displayed the brilliant and sombre imagination of the North. No one has spoken with a more eloquent emotion of death, the vast night of forgetfulness, of the all-devouring pit, of human vanity, which tries to create an immortality out of ephemeral glory or sculptured stones. No one has revealed, in more glowing and original expressions, the poetic sap which flows through all the minds of the age.

'But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana, he is almost lost that built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal duration; and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon. Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? Without the favour of the everlasting register, the first man had been as unknown as the last, and Methuselah's long life had been his only chronicle.

'Oblivion is not to be hired. The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the register of God, not in the record of man. Twenty-seven names make up the first story before the flood, and the recorded names ever since contain not one living century. The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live. The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox? Every hour adds unto the current arithmetick which scarce stands one moment. And since death must be the Lucina of life, and even Pagans could doubt, whether thus to live were to die; since our longest sun sets at right declensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness, and have our light in ashes; since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying mementos, and time, that grows old in itself, bids us hope no long duration;—diuturnity is a dream, and folly of expectation.

'Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings; we slightly remember our felicities, and the smartest strokes of affliction leave but short smart upon us. Sense endureth no extremities, and sorrows destroy us or themselves. To weep into stones are fables. Afflictions induce callositics; miseries are slippery, or fall like snow upon

us, which notwithstanding is no unhappy stupidity. To be ignorant of evils to come, and forgetful of evils past, is a merciful provision of nature, whereby we digest the mixture of our few and evil days; and our delivered senses not relapsing into cutting remembrances, our sorrows are not kept raw by the edge of repetitions. . . . All was vanity, feeding the wind, and folly. The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyses or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth. Mummy is become merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams. . . . Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave, solemnizing nativities and deaths with equal lustre, nor omitting ceremonies of bravery in the infancy of his nature . . . Pyramids, arches, obelisks, were but the irregularities of vain glory, and wild enormities of ancient magnanimity.'[1]

These are almost the words of a poet, and it is just this poet's imagination which urges him onward into science.[2] Amidst the productions of nature he abounds with conjectures, generalisations; he gropes about, proposing explanations, making trials, extending his guesses like so many flexible and vibrating tentacula into the four corners of the globe, into the most distant regions of fancy and truth. As he looks upon the tree-like and foliated crusts which are formed upon the surface of freezing liquids, he asks himself if this be not a regeneration of vegetable essences, dissolved in the liquid. At the sight of curdling blood or milk, he inquires whether there be not something analogous to the formation of the bird in the egg, or in that coagulation of chaos which gave birth to our world. In presence of that impalpable force which makes liquids freeze, he asks if apoplexies and cataracts are not the effects of a like power, and do not indicate the presence of a congealing agency. He is in presence of nature as an artist, a literary man, in presence of a living countenance, marking every feature, every movement of physiognomy, so as to be able to divine the passions of the inner disposition, ceaselessly correcting and reversing his interpretations, kept in agitation by the invisible forces which operate beneath the visible envelope. The whole of the middle-age and of antiquity, with their theories and imaginations, Platonism, Cabalism, Christian theology, Aristotle's substantial forms, the specific forms of the alchemists,—all human speculations, strangled or transformed one within the other, meet simultaneously in his brain, so as to open up to him vistas of this unknown world. The mass, the pile, the confusion, the inner fermentation and swarming, mingled with vapours and flashes, the tumultuous overloading of his imagination and his mind, oppress and agitate him. In this expectation and emotion his curiosity is enlisted in everything; in reference to the least fact, the most special, the oldest, the most chimerical, he conceives a chain of complicated investigation, calculating how the ark could contain all creatures, with their provision of food; how Perpenna, in his feast, arranged the invited so as to strike Sertorius,

[1] *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Wilkin, 1852, 3 vols. *Hydriotaphia*, iii. ch. v. 44 *et passim*.

[2] See Milsand, *Etude sur Sir Thomas Browne, Revue des deux Mondes*, 1858.

his guest; what trees must have grown on the banks of Acheron, supposing that there were any; whether quincunx plantations had not their origin in Eden, and whether the numbers and geometrical figures contained in the lozenge-form are not met with in all the productions of nature and art. You may recognise here the exuberance and the strange caprices of an inner development too ample and too strong. Archæology, chemistry, history, nature, there is nothing in which he is not interested to the extent of a passion, which does not cause his memory and his ingenuity to overflow, which does not summon up within him the idea of some force, certainly admirable, possibly infinite. But what finishes in depicting him, what signalises the advance of science, is the fact that his imagination provides a counterbalance against itself. He is as fertile in doubts as he is in explanations. If he sees the thousand reasons which tend to one view, he sees also the thousand which tend to the contrary. At the two extremities of the same fact, he raises up to the clouds, but in equal piles, the scaffolding of contradictory arguments. Having made a guess, he knows that it is but a guess; he pauses, ends with a perhaps, recommends verification. His writings consist only of opinions, given as such; even his principal work is a refutation of popular errors. After all, he proposes questions, suggests explanations, suspends his judgments; nothing more, but this is enough: when the search is so eager, when the paths in which it proceeds are so numerous, when it is so scrupulous in making certain of its basis, the issue of the pursuit is sure; we are but a few steps from the truth.

V.

In this band of scholars, dreamers, and enquirers, appears the most comprehensive, sensible, originative of the minds of the age, Francis Bacon, a great and luminous intellect, one of the finest of this poetic progeny, who, like his predecessors, was naturally disposed to clothe his ideas in the most splendid dress: in this age, a thought did not seem complete until it had assumed a form and colour. But what distinguishes him from the others is, that with him an image only serves to concentrate meditation. He reflected long, stamped on his mind all the parts and joints of his subject; and then, instead of dissipating his complete idea in a graduated chain of reasoning, he embodies it in a comparison so expressive, exact, transparent, that behind the figure we perceive all the details of the idea, like a liquor in a fair crystal vase. Judge of his style by a single example:

'For as water, whether it be the dew of Heaven or the springs of the earth, easily scatters and loses itself in the ground, except it be collected into some receptacle, where it may by union and consort comfort and sustain itself (and for that cause, the industry of man has devised aqueducts, cisterns, and pools, and likewise beautified them with various ornaments of magnificence and state, as well as for use and necessity); so this excellent liquor of knowledge, whether it descend

from divine inspiration or spring from human sense, would soon perish and vanish into oblivion, if it were not preserved in books, traditions, conferences, and especially in places appointed for such matters as universities, colleges, and schools, where it may have both a fixed habitation, and means and opportunity of increasing and collecting itself.'[1]

'The greatest error of all the rest, is the mistaking or misplacing of the last or farthest end of knowledge: for men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite; sometimes to entertain their minds with variety and delight; sometimes for ornament and reputation; and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction; and most times for lucre and profession; and seldom sincerely to give a true account of their gift of reason, to the benefit and use of men: as if there were sought in knowledge a couch whereupon to rest a searching and restless spirit; or a terrace, for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect; or a tower of state, for a proud mind to raise itself upon; or a fort or commanding ground, for strife and contention; or a shop, for profit or sale; and not a rich storehouse, for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of man's estate.'[2]

This is his mode of thought, by symbols, not by analysis; instead of explaining his idea, he transposes and translates it,—translates it entire, to the smallest details, enclosing all in the majesty of a grand period, or in the brevity of a striking sentence. Thence springs a style of admirable richness, gravity, and vigour, now solemn and symmetrical, now concise and piercing, always elaborate and full of colour.[3] There is nothing in English prose superior to his diction.

Thence is derived also his manner of conceiving of things. He is not a dialectician, like Hobbes or Descartes, apt in arranging ideas, in educing one from another, in leading his reader from the simple to the complex by an unbroken chain. He is a producer of conceptions and of sentences. The matter being explored, he says to us: 'Such it is; touch it not on that side; it must be approached from the other.' Nothing more; no proof, no effort to convince: he affirms, and does nothing more; he has thought in the manner of artists and poets, and he speaks after the manner of prophets and seers. *Cogita et visa*, this title of one of his books might be the title of all. The most admirable, the *Novum Organum*, is a string of aphorisms,—a collection, as it were, of scientific decrees, as of an oracle who foresees the future and reveals the truth. And to make the resemblance complete, he expresses them by poetical figures, by enigmatic abbreviations, almost in Sibylline verses: *Idola specûs*, *Idola tribûs*, *Idola fori*, *Idola theatri*, every one will recall these strange names, by which he signifies the four kinds of illusions to which man is subject.[4] Shakspeare and the seers do not

[1] Bacon's *Works*. Translation of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Book ii.; To the King.

[2] *Ibid.* Book i. The true end of learning mistaken.

[3] Especially in the *Essays*.

[4] See also *Novum Organum*, Books i. and ii.; the twenty-seven kinds of examples, with their metaphorical names: *Instantiæ crucis*, *divortii januæ*, *Instantiæ innuentes*, *polychrestæ*, *magicæ*, etc.

contain more vigorous or expressive condensations of thought, more resembling inspiration, and in Bacon they are to be found everywhere. In short, his process is that of the creators; it is intuition, not reasoning. When he has laid up his store of facts, the greatest possible, on some vast subject, on some entire province of the mind, on the whole anterior philosophy, on the general condition of the sciences, on the power and limits of human reason, he casts over all this a comprehensive view, as it were a great net, brings up a universal idea, condenses his idea into a maxim, and hands it to us with the words, 'Verify and profit by it.'

There is nothing more hazardous, more like fantasy, than this mode of thought, when it is not checked by natural and strong good sense. This common sense, which is a kind of natural divination, the stable equilibrium of an intellect always gravitating to the true, like the needle to the north pole, Bacon possesses in the highest degree. He has a pre-eminently practical, even an utilitarian mind, such as we meet with later in Bentham, and such as their business habits were to impress more and more upon the English. At the age of sixteen, while at the university, he was dissatisfied with Aristotle's philosophy,[1] not that he thought meanly of the author, whom, on the contrary, he calls a great genius; but because it seemed to him of no practical utility, 'incapable of producing works which might promote the well-being of men.' We see that from the outset he struck upon his dominant idea: all else comes to him from this; a contempt for antecedent philosophy, the conception of a different system, the entire reformation of the sciences by the indication of a new goal, the definition of a distinct method, the opening up of unsuspected anticipations.[2] It is never speculation which he relishes, but the practical application of it. His eyes are turned not to heaven, but to earth, not to things 'abstract and vain,' but to things palpable and solid, not to curious but to profitable truths. He seeks to better the condition of men, to labour for the welfare of mankind, to enrich human life with new discoveries and new resources, to equip mankind with new powers and new instruments of action. His philosophy itself is but an instrument, *organum*, a sort of machine or lever constructed to enable the intellect to raise a weight, to break through obstacles, to open up vistas, to accomplish tasks which had hitherto surpassed its power. In his eyes, every special science, like science in general, should be an implement. He invites mathematicians to quit their pure geometry, to study numbers only with a view to their physical application, to seek formulas only to calculate real quantities and natural motions.

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[1] *The Works of Francis Bacon*, London 1824, vol. vii. p. 2. *Latin Biography* by Rawley.

[2] This point is brought out by the review of Lord Macaulay. *Critical and Historical Essays*, vol. iii.

He recommends moralists to study the mind, the passions, habits, endeavours, not merely in a speculative way, but with a view to the cure or diminution of vice, and assigns to the science of morals as its end the amelioration of morals. For him, the object of science is always the establishment of an art, that is, the production of something of practical utility; when he wished to describe the efficacious nature of his philosophy apparent by a tale, he delineated in the *New Atlantis*, with a poet's boldness and the precision of a seer, with almost literal exactness, modern applications, and the present organisation of the sciences, academies, observatories, air-balloons, submarine vessels, the improvement of land, the transmutation of species, regenerations, the discovery of remedies, the preservation of food. 'The end of our foundation,' says his principal personage, 'is the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.' And this 'possible' is infinite.

How did this grand and just conception originate? Doubtless common sense and genius too were necessary to its production; but neither common sense nor genius was lacking to men: there had been more than one who, remarking, like Bacon, the progress of particular industries, could, like him, have conceived of universal industry, and from certain limited ameliorations have advanced to unlimited amelioration. Here we see the power of combined efforts; men think they do everything by their individual thought, and they can do nothing without the assistance of the thoughts of their neighbours; they fancy that they are following the small voice within them, but they only hear it because it is swelled by the thousand buzzing and imperious voices, which, issuing from all surrounding things, far and near, are confounded with it in an harmonious vibration. Generally they hear it, as Bacon did, from the first moment of reflection; but it had become inaudible among the opposing sounds from without. Could this confidence in the infinite enlargement of human power, this glorious idea of the universal conquest of nature, this firm hope in the continual increase of well-being and happiness, have germinated, grown, occupied an intelligence entirely, and thence have struck its roots, been propagated and spread over neighbouring intelligences, in a time of discouragement and decay, when men believed the end of the world at hand, when things were falling into ruin about them, when Christian mysticism, as in the first centuries, ecclesiastical tyranny, as in the fourteenth century, were convincing them of their impotence, by perverting their intellectual efforts and curtailing their liberty? More than that: such hopes must then have seemed to be outbursts of pride, or suggestions of the flesh. They did seem so; and the last representatives of ancient science, and the first of the new, were exiled or imprisoned, assassinated or burned. In order to be developed, an idea must be in harmony with surrounding civilisation;

before man can expect to attain the dominion over nature, or attempts to improve his condition, amelioration must have begun on all sides, industries have increased, knowledge have been accumulated, the arts expanded, a hundred thousand irrefutable witnesses must have come to give proof of his power and assurance of his progress. The 'masculine birth of the time' (*temporis partus masculus*) is the title which Bacon applies to his work, and it is a true one. In fact, the whole age co-operated in it; by this creation it was finished. The consciousness of human power and prosperity furnished to the Renaissance its first energy, its ideal, its poetic materials, its distinguishing features; and now it furnished it with its final expression, its scientific doctrine, and its ultimate object.

We may add also, its method. For, the end of a journey once fixed, the route is laid down, since the end always determines the route; when the point of arrival is changed, the path of approach is changed, and science, varying its object, varies also its method. So long as it limited its effort to the satisfying an idle curiosity, opening out speculative vistas, establishing a sort of opera in speculative minds, it could launch out any moment into metaphysical abstractions and distinctions: it was enough for it to skim over experience; it soon quitted it, and came all at once upon great words, quiddities, the principle of individuation, final causes. Half proofs sufficed science; at bottom it did not care to establish a truth, but to get an opinion; and its instrument, the syllogism, was serviceable only for refutations, not for discoveries: it took general laws for a starting-point instead of a point of arrival; instead of going to find them, it fancied them found. The syllogism was good in the schools, not in nature; it made disputants, not discoverers. From the moment that science had art for an end, and men studied in order to act, all was transformed; for we cannot act without certain and precise knowledge. Forces, before they can be employed, must be measured and verified; before we can build a house, we must know exactly the resistance of the beams, or the house will collapse; before we can cure a sick man, we must know with certainty the effect of a remedy, or the patient will die. Practice makes certainty and exactitude a necessity to science, because practice is impossible when it has nothing to lean upon but guesses and approximations. How can we eliminate guesses and approximations? We must imitate the cases in which science, issuing in practice, is shown to be precise and certain, and these cases are the industries. We must, as in the industries, observe, essay, attempt, verify, keep our mind fixed 'on sensible and particular things,' advance to general rules only step by step; 'not anticipate' experience, but follow it; not imagine nature, but 'interpret it.' For every general effect, such as heat, whiteness, hardness, liquidity, we must seek a general condition, so that in producing the condition we may produce the effect. And for this it is necessary, 'by fit rejections

and exclusions,' to extract the condition sought from the heap of facts in which it lies buried, construct the table of cases from which the effect is absent, the table where it is present, the table where the effect is shown in various degrees, so as to isolate and bring to light the condition which produced it.[1] Then we shall have, not useless universal axioms, but 'efficacious mediate axioms,' true laws from which we can derive works, and which are the sources of power in the same degree as the sources of light.[2] Bacon described and predicted in this modern science and industry, their correspondence, method, resources, principle; and after more than two centuries, it is still to him that we go to discover the theory of what we are attempting and doing.

Beyond this great view, he has discovered nothing. Cowley, one of his admirers, justly said that, like Moses on Mount Pisgah, he was the first to announce the promised land; but he might have added quite as justly, that, like Moses, he did not enter there. He pointed out the route, but did not travel it; he taught men how to discover natural laws, but discovered none. His definition of heat is extremely imperfect. His *Natural History* is full of chimerical explanations.[3] Like the poets, he peoples nature with instincts and desires; attributes to bodies an actual voracity, to the atmosphere a thirst for the light, sounds, odours, vapours, which it drinks in; to metals a sort of haste to be incorporated with acids. He explains the duration of the bubbles of air which float on the surface of liquids, by supposing that air has a very small or no attraction to high latitudes. He sees in every quality, weight, ductility, hardness, a distinct essence which has its special cause; so that when one knows the cause of every quality of gold, one will be able to put all these causes together, and make gold. In brief, with the alchemists, Paracelsus and Gilbert, Kepler himself, with all the men of his time, men of imagination, nourished on Aristotle, he represents nature as a compound of secret and lively energies, inexplicable and primordial forces, distinct and indecomposable essences, adapted each by the will of the Creator to produce a distinct effect. He almost saw souls endowed with dull repugnances and occult inclinations, which aspire to or resist certain directions, certain mixtures, and certain localities. On this account also he confounds everything in his researches in an undistinguishable mass, vegetative and medicinal properties, physical and moral, without considering the most complex as depending on the simplest, but each on the contrary in itself, and taken apart, as an irreducible and independent existence. Obstinate in this error, the thinkers of the age mark time without advancing. They see clearly with Bacon the wide field of discovery, but they cannot advance into it. They want an idea, and for want of this idea they do not advance. The disposition of mind which but now was a lever, is become

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[1] *Novum Organum*, ii. 15 and 16. [2] *Novum Organum*, i. i. 3.
[3] *Natural History*, 800, 24, etc. *De Augmentis*, iii. i.

an obstacle: it must be changed, that the obstacle may be got rid of. For ideas, I mean great and efficacious ones, do not come at will nor by chance, by the effort of an individual, or by a happy accident. Like literatures and religions, methods and philosophies arise from the spirit of the age; and this spirit of the age makes them potent or powerless. One state of public intelligence excludes a certain kind of literature; another, a certain scientific conception. When it happens thus, writers and thinkers labour in vain, the literature is abortive, the conception does not make its appearance. In vain they turn one way and another, trying to remove the weight which hinders them; something stronger than themselves paralyses their hands and frustrates their endeavours. The central pivot of the vast wheel on which human affairs move must be displaced one notch, that all may move with its motion. At this moment the pivot was moved, and thus a revolution of the great wheel begins, bringing round a new conception of nature, and in consequence that part of the method which was lacking. To the diviners, the creators, the comprehensive and impassioned minds who seized objects in a lump and in masses, succeeded the discursive thinkers, the systematic thinkers, the graduated and clear logicians, who, disposing ideas in continuous series, led the hearer insensibly from the simple to the most complex by easy and unbroken paths. Descartes superseded Bacon; the classical age obliterated the Renaissance; poetry and lofty imagination gave way before rhetoric, eloquence, and analysis. In this transformation of mind, ideas were transformed. Everything was sobered down and simplified. The universe, like all else, was reduced to two or three notions; and the conception of nature, which was poetical, became mechanical. Instead of souls, living forces, repugnances, and attractions, we have pulleys, levers, impelling forces. The world, which seemed a mass of instinctive powers, is now like a mere machinery of serrated wheels. Beneath this adventurous supposition lies a large and certain truth: that there is, namely, a scale of facts, some at the summit very complex, others at the base very simple; those above having their origin in those below, so that the lower ones explain the higher; and that we must seek the primary laws of things in the laws of motion. The search was made, and Galileo found them. Thenceforth the work of the Renaissance, passing the extreme point to which Bacon had pushed it, and at which he had left it, was able to proceed onward by itself, and did so proceed, without limit.

CHAPTER II.

The Theatre.

I. The public—The stage.
II. Manners of the sixteenth century—Violent and complete expansion of nature.
III. English manners—Expansion of the energetic and gloomy character.
IV. The poets—General harmony between the character of a poet and that of his age—Nash, Decker, Kyd, Peele, Lodge, Greene—Their condition and life—Marlowe—His life—His works—*Tamburlaine*—*The Jew of Malta*—*Edward II.*—*Faustus*—His conception of man.
V. Formation of this drama—The process and character of this art—Imitative sympathy, which depicts by expressive specimens—Contrast of classical and Germanic art—Psychological construction and proper sphere of these two arts.
VI. Male characters—Furious passions—Tragical events—Exaggerated characters—*The Duke of Milan* by Massinger—Ford's *Annabella*—Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and *Vittoria*—Female characters—Germanic idea of love and marriage—Euphrasia, Bianca, Arethusa, Ordella, Aspasia, Amoret, in Beaumont and Fletcher — Penthea in Ford — Agreement of the moral and physical type.

WE must look at this world more closely, and beneath the ideas which are developed seek for the men who live; it is the theatre especially which is the original product of the English Renaissance, and it is the theatre especially which will exhibit the men of the English Renaissance. Forty poets, amongst them ten of superior rank, and the greatest of all artists who have represented the soul in words; many hundreds of pieces, and nearly fifty masterpieces; the drama extended over all the provinces of history, imagination, and fancy,—expanded so as to embrace comedy, tragedy, pastoral and fanciful literature—to represent all degrees of human condition, and all the caprices of human invention—to express all the sensitive details of actual truth, and all the philosophic grandeur of general reflection; the stage disencumbered of all precept and freed from all imitation, given up and appropriated in the minutest particulars to the reigning taste and the public intelligence: all this was a vast and manifold work, capable by its flexibility, its greatness, and its form, of receiving and preserving the exact imprint of the age and of the nation.[1]

[1] Shakspeare, 'The very age and body of the time, his form and pressure.'

I.

Let us try, then, to set before our eyes this public, this audience, and this stage—all connected with one another, as in every natural and living work; and if ever there was a living and natural work, it is here. There were already seven theatres in Shakspeare's time, so brisk and universal was the taste for representations. Great and rude contrivances, awkward in their construction, barbarous in their appointments; but a fervid imagination readily supplied all that they lacked, and hardy bodies endured all inconveniences without difficulty. On a dirty site, on the banks of the Thames, rose the principal theatre, the Globe, a sort of hexagonal tower, surrounded by a muddy ditch, surmounted by a red flag. The common people could enter as well as the rich: there were sixpenny, twopenny, even penny seats; but they could not see it without money. If it rained, and it often rains in London, the people in the pit, butchers, mercers, bakers, sailors, apprentices, receive the streaming rain upon their heads. I suppose they did not trouble themselves about it; it was not so long since they began to pave the streets of London; and when men, like them, have had experience of sewers and puddles, they are not afraid of catching cold. While waiting for the piece, they amuse themselves after their fashion, drink beer, crack nuts, eat fruits, howl, and now and then resort to their fists; they have been known to fall upon the actors, and turn the theatre upside down. At other times they have gone in disgust to the tavern to give the poet a hiding, or toss him in a blanket; they were rude jokers, and there was no month when the cry of 'Clubs' did not call them out of their shops to exercise their brawny arms. When the beer took effect, there was a great upturned barrel in the pit, a peculiar receptacle for general use. The smell rises, and then comes the cry, 'Burn the juniper!' They burn some in a plate on the stage, and the heavy smoke fills the air. Certainly the folk there assembled could scarcely get disgusted at anything, and cannot have had sensitive noses. In the time of Rabelais there was not much cleanness to speak of. Remember that they were hardly out of the middle-age, and that in the middle-age man lived on the dunghill.

Above them, on the stage, were the spectators able to pay a shilling, the elegant people, the gentlefolk. These were sheltered from the rain, and if they chose to pay an extra shilling, could have a stool. To this were reduced the prerogatives of rank and the devices of comfort: it often happened that stools were lacking; then they stretched themselves on the ground: they were not dainty at such times. They play cards, smoke, insult the pit, who give it them back without stinting, and throw apples at them into the bargain. As for the gentlefolk, they gesticulate, swear in Italian, French, English;[1] crack

[1] Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour; Cynthia's Revels.*

aloud jokes in dainty, composite, high-coloured words: in short, they have the energetic, original, gay manners of artists, the same humour, the same absence of constraint, and, to complete the resemblance, the same desire to make themselves singular, the same imaginative cravings, the same absurd and picturesque devices, beards cut to a point, into the shape of a fan, a spade, the letter T, gaudy and expensive dresses, copied from five or six neighbouring nations, embroidered, laced with gold, motley, continually heightened in effect, or changed for others: there was, as it were, a carnival in their brains as on their backs.

With such spectators illusions could be produced without much trouble: there were no preparations or perspectives; few or no moveable scenes: their imaginations took all this upon them. A scroll in big letters announced to the public that they were in London or Constantinople; and that was enough to carry the public to the desired place. There was no trouble about probability. Sir Philip Sidney writes:

'You shall have Asia of the one side, and Africke of the other, and so many other under-kingdomes, that the Plaier when hee comes in, must ever begin with telling where hee is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now shall you have three Ladies walke to gather flowers, and then wee must beleeve the stage to be a garden. By and by wee heare newes of shipwracke in the same place, then wee are to blame if we accept it not for a rocke; . . . while in the meane time two armies flie in, represented with foure swordes and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? Now of time they are much more liberall. For ordinary it is, that two young Princes fall in love, after many traverses, shee is got with childe, delivered of a faire boy, hee is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love, and is readie to get another childe; and all this in two houres space.'[1]

Doubtless these enormities were somewhat reduced under Shakspeare; with a few hangings, rude representations of animals, towers, forests, they assisted somewhat the public imagination. But in fact, in Shakspeare's plays as in all others, the public imagination is the great contriver; it must lend itself to all, substitute all, accept for a queen a young boy whose beard is beginning to grow, endure in one act twelve changes of place, leap suddenly over twenty years or five hundred miles,[2] take half a dozen supernumeraries for forty thousand men, and to have represented by the rolling of the drums all the battles of Cæsar, Henry v., Coriolanus, Richard III. All this, imagination, being so overflowing and so young, does accept! Recall your own youth; for my part, the deepest emotions I have had at a theatre were given to me by an ambling bevy of four young girls, playing comedy and drama on a stage in a coffeehouse; true, I was eleven years old. So in this theatre, at this moment, their souls were fresh, as ready to feel everything as the poet was to dare everything.

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[1] *The Defence of Poesie*, ed. 1629, p. 562.

[2] *Winter's Tale; Cymbeline; Julius Cæsar.*

II.

These are but externals; let us try to advance further, to observe the passions, the bent of mind, the inner man: it is this inner state which raised and modelled the drama, as everything else; invisible inclinations are everywhere the cause of visible works, and the interior shapes the exterior. What are these townspeople, courtiers, this public, whose taste fashions the theatre? what is there particular in the structure and condition of their mind? The condition must needs be particular; for the drama flourishes all of a sudden, and for sixty years together, with marvellous luxuriance, and at the end of this time is arrested so that no effort could revive it. The structure must be particular; for of all theatres, old and new, this is distinct in form, and displays a style, action, characters, an idea of life, which are not found in any age or any country beside. This particular feature is the free and complete expansion of nature.

What we call nature in men is, man such as he was before culture and civilisation had deformed and re-formed him. Almost always, when a new generation arrives at manhood and consciousness, it finds a code of precepts which it imposes on itself, with all the weight and authority of antiquity. A hundred kinds of chains, a hundred thousand kinds of ties, religion, morality, manners, every legislation which regulates sentiments, morals, manners, fetter and tame the creature of impulse and passion which breathes and frets within each of us. There is nothing like that here. It is a regeneration, and the curb of the past is wanting to the present. Catholicism, reduced to external ceremony and clerical chicanery, had just ended; Protestantism, arrested in its endeavours, or straying into sects, had not yet gained the mastery; the religion of discipline was grown feeble, and the religion of morals was not yet established; men ceased to listen to the directions of the clergy, and had not yet spelt out the law of conscience. The church was turned into an assembly room, as in Italy; the young fellows came to St. Paul's to walk, laugh, chatter, display their new cloaks; the thing had even passed into a custom. They paid for the noise they made with their spurs, and this tax was a source of income to the canons;[1] pickpockets, the girls of the town, came there by crowds; these latter struck their bargains while service was going on. Imagine, in short, that the scruples of conscience and the severity of the Puritans were odious things, and that they ridiculed them on the stage,

[1] Strype, in his *Annals of the Reformation* (1571), says: 'Many now were wholly departed from the communion of the church, and came no more to hear divine service in their parish churches, nor received the holy sacrament, according to the laws of the realm.' Richard Baxter, in his *Life*, published in 1696, says: 'We lived in a country that had but little preaching at all. . . . In the village where I lived the Reader read the Common Prayer briefly; and the rest of the day, even till dark night almost, except Eating time, was spent in Dancing under a Maypole

and judge of the difference between this sensual, unbridled England, and the correct, disciplined, stern England of our own time. Ecclesiastical or secular, we find no signs of rule. In the failure of faith, reason had not gained sway, and opinion is as void of authority as tradition. The imbecile age, which has just ended, continues buried in scorn, with its ravings, its verse-makers, and its pedantic text-books; and out of the liberal opinions derived from antiquity, from Italy, France, and Spain, every one could pick as it pleased him, without stooping to restraint or acknowledging a superiority. There was no model imposed on them, as nowadays; instead of affecting imitation, they affected originality.[1] Each strove to be himself, with his own oaths, fashions, costumes, his specialties of conduct and humour, and to be unlike every one else. They said not, 'So and so is done,' but 'I do so and so.' Instead of restraining themselves, they expanded. There was no etiquette of society; save for an exaggerated jargon of chivalresque courtesy, they are masters of speech and action on the impulse of the moment. You will find them free from decorum, as of all else. In this outbreak and absence of fetters, they resemble thorough-bred horses let loose in the meadow. Their inborn instincts have not been tamed, nor muzzled, nor diminished.

On the contrary, they have been preserved intact by bodily and military training; and escaping as they were from barbarism, not from civilisation, they had not been acted upon by the inner softening and hereditary tempering which are now transmitted with the blood, and civilise a man from the moment of his birth. This is why man, who for three centuries has been a domestic animal, was still almost a savage beast, and the force of his muscles and the strength of his nerves increased the boldness and energy of his passions. Look at these uncultivated men, men of the people, how suddenly the blood warms and rises to their face; their fists double, their lips press together, and those vigorous bodies are hurried at once into action. The courtiers of that age were like our men of the people. They had the same taste for the exercise of their limbs, the same indifference toward the inclemencies of the weather, the same coarseness of language, the same undisguised sensuality. They were carmen in body and gentlemen in sentiment, with the dress of actors and the tastes of artists. 'At fourtene,' says John Hardyng, 'a lordes sonnes shalle to felde hunte the dere, and catch an hardynesse. For dere to hunte and slea, and see them blede, ane hardyment gyffith to his courage. . . . At sextene yere, to werray and to wage, to juste and ryde, and castels to assayle . . . and every

and a great tree, not far from my father's door, where all the Town did meet together. And though one of my father's own Tenants was the piper, he could not restrain him nor break the sport. So that we could not read the Scripture in our family without the great disturbance of the Taber and Pipe and noise in the street.'

[1] Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*.

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day his armure to assay in fete of armes with some of his meyne.' When ripened to manhood, he is employed with the bow, in wrestling, leaping, vaulting. Henry VIII.'s court, in its noisy merriment, was like a village fair. The king, says Holinshed, exercised himself 'dailie in shooting, singing, dancing, wrestling, casting of the barre, plaieing at the recorders, flute, virginals, in setting of songs, and making of ballads.' He leaps the moats with a pole, and was once within an ace of being killed. He is so fond of combat, that publicly, on the field of the Cloth of Gold, he seized Francis I. in his arms to throw him. This is how a soldier or a bricklayer nowadays tries a new comrade. In fact, they regarded as amusements, like soldiers and bricklayers, gross jests and brutal buffooneries. In every great house there was a fool, 'whose business was to bring out pointed jests, to make eccentric gestures, horrible faces, to sing licentious songs,' as one might hear now in a beer-house. They thought malice and obscenity a joke. They were foul-mouthed, they swallowed Rabelais' words undiluted, and delighted in conversation which would revolt us. They had no respect for humanity; the empire of proprieties and the habits of good breeding began only under Louis XIV., and by imitation of the French; at this time they all blurted out the word that fitted in, and that was most frequently a coarse word. You will see on the stage, in Shakspeare's *Pericles*, the filth of a haunt of vice.[2] The great lords, the well-dressed ladies, spoke Billingsgate slang. When Henry V. paid his court to Catherine of France, it was with the coarse bearing of a sailor who might have taken a fancy to a sutler; and like the tars who tattoo a heart on their arms to prove their love for the girls they left behind them, you find men who 'devoured sulphur and drank urine'[3] to win their mistress by a proof of affection. Humanity is as much lacking as decency.[4] Blood, suffering, does not move them. The

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[1] *The Chronicle* of John Hardyng (1436), ed. H. Ellis, 1812. Preface.

[2] Act iv. 2 and 4. See also the character of Calypso in Massinger; Putana in Ford; Protalyce in Beaumont and Fletcher.

[3] Middleton, *Dutch Courtezan.*

[4] Commission given by Henry VIII. to the Earl of Hertford, 1544: 'You are there to put all to fire and sword; to burn Edinburgh town, and to raze and deface it, when you have sacked it, and gotten what you can out of it. . . . Do what you can out of hand, and without long tarrying, to beat down and overthrow the castle, sack Holyrood-House, and as many towns and villages about Edinburgh as ye conveniently can; sack Leith, and burn and subvert it, and all the rest, putting man, woman, and child to fire and sword, without exception, when any resistance shall be made against you; and this done, pass over to the Fife land, and extend like extremities and destructions in all towns and villages whereunto ye may reach conveniently, not forgetting amongst all the rest, so to spoil and turn upside down the cardinal's town of St Andrew's, as the upper stone may be the nether, and not one stick stand by another, sparing no creature alive within the same, specially such as either in friendship or blood be allied to the cardinal. This journey shall succeed most to his majesty's honour.'—*Pictorial History of England*, ii. 440, note.

court frequents bear and bull baitings, where dogs are ripped up and chained beasts are sometimes beaten to death, and it was, says an officer of the palace, 'a charming entertainment.'[1] No wonder they used their arms like clodhoppers and gossips. Elizabeth used to beat her maids of honour, 'so that these beautiful girls could often be heard crying and lamenting in a piteous manner.' One day she spat upon Sir Mathew's fringed coat; at another time, when Essex, whom she was scolding, turned his back, she gave him a box on the ears. It was then the practice of great ladies to beat their children and their servants. Poor Jane Grey was sometimes so wretchedly 'boxed, struck, pinched, and ill-treated in other manners which she dare not relate,' that she used to wish herself dead. Their first idea is to come to words, to blows, to have satisfaction. As in feudal times, they appeal at once to arms, and retain the habit of gaining justice for themselves, and without delay. 'On Thursday laste,' writes Gilbert Talbot to the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury, 'as my Lorde Rytche was rydynge in the streates, there was one Wyndam that stode in a dore, and shotte a dagge at him, thynkynge to have slayne him. . . . The same daye, also, as Sr John Conway was goynge in the streetes, Mr Lodovyke Grevell came sodenly upon him, and stroke him on the hedd wth a sworde. . . . I am forced to trouble yor Honors wth thes tryflynge matters, for I know no greater.'[2] No one, not even the queen, is safe among these violent dispositions.[3] Again, when one man struck another in the precincts of the court, his hand was cut off, and the arteries stopped with a red-hot iron. Only such atrocious imitations of their own crimes, and the painful image of bleeding and suffering flesh, could tame their vehemence and restrain the uprising of their instincts. Judge now what materials they furnish to the theatre, and what characters they look for at the theatre: to please the public, the stage cannot deal too much in open lust and the strongest passions; it must depict man attaining the limit of his desires, unchecked, almost mad, now trembling and rooted before the white palpitating flesh which his eyes devour, now haggard and grinding his teeth before the enemy whom he wishes to tear to pieces, now carried beyond himself and overwhelmed at the sight of the honours and wealth which he courts, always raging and enveloped in a tempest of eddying ideas, sometimes shaken by impetuous joy, more often on the verge of fury and madness, stronger, more ardent, more daringly let loose beyond the pale of reason and law than he himself ever was. We hear from the stage as from the history of the time, these fierce murmurs: the sixteenth century is like a den of lions.

Amid passions so strong as these there is not one lacking. Nature

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[1] Laneham, *A Goodly Relief.*

[2] 13th February 1587. Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, ii. p. 165. See also the same work for all these details.

[3] Essex, when struck by the queen, put his hand on the hilt of his sword.

appears here in all its violence, but also in all its fulness. If nothing had been softened, nothing had been mutilated. It is the entire man who is displayed, heart, mind, body, senses, with his noblest and finest aspirations, as with his most bestial and savage appetites, without the preponderance of any dominant circumstance to cast him altogether in one direction, to exalt or degrade him. He has not become rigid, as he will be under Puritanism. He is not uncrowned, as in the Restoration. After the hollowness and weariness of the fifteenth century, he rose up by a second birth, as before in Greece man had risen by a first birth; and now, as then, the temptations of the outer world came combined to raise his faculties from their sloth and torpor. A sort of generous warmth spread over them to ripen and make them flourish. Peace, prosperity, comfort began; new industries and increasing activity suddenly multiplied objects of utility and luxury tenfold. America and India, by their discovery, caused the treasures and prodigies heaped up afar over distant seas to shine before their eyes; antiquity re-discovered, sciences mapped out, the Reformation begun, books multiplied by printing, ideas by books, doubled the means of enjoyment, imagination, and thought. They wanted to enjoy, to imagine, and to think; for the desire grows with the attraction, and here all attractions were combined. There were attractions of the senses, in the chambers which they began to warm, in the beds newly furnished with pillows, in the carriages which they began to use for the first time. There were attractions for the imagination in the new palaces, arranged after the Italian manner; in the variegated hangings from Flanders; in the rich garments, gold-embroidered, which, being continually changed, combined the fancies and the splendours of all Europe. There were attractions for the mind, in the noble and beautiful writings which, spread abroad, translated, explained, brought in philosophy, eloquence, and poetry, from the restored antiquity, and from the surrounding Renaissance. Under this appeal all aptitudes and instincts at once started up; the low and the lofty, ideal and sensual love, gross cupidity and pure generosity. Recall what you yourself experienced, when from being a child you became a man: what wishes for happiness, what breadth of anticipation, what intoxication of heart you indulged in in face of all these joys; with what impulse your hands reached involuntarily and all at once every branch of the tree, and would not let a single fruit escape. At sixteen years, like Chérubin,[1] we wish for a servant girl while we adore a Madonna; we are capable of every species of covetousness, and also of every species of self-denial; we find virtue more lovely, our meals more enjoyable; pleasure has more zest, heroism more worth; there is no allurement which is not keen; the sweetness and novelty of things are too strong; and in the hive of passions which buzzes within us, and stings us like the sting

[1] A page in the *Mariage de Figaro*, a comedy by Beaumarchais.—Tr.

of a bee, we can do nothing but plunge, one after another, into all sensations. Such were the men of this time, Raleigh, Essex, Elizabeth, Henry VIII. himself, excessive and inconstant, ready for devotion and for crime, violent in good and evil, heroic with strange weaknesses, humble with sudden changes of mood, never vile with premeditation like the roysterers of the Restoration, never rigid on principle like the Puritans of the Revolution, capable of weeping like children,[1] and of dying like men, often base courtiers, more than once true knights, displaying constantly, amidst all these contradictions of bearing, only the overflowing of nature. Thus prepared, they could take in everything, sanguinary ferocity and refined generosity, the brutality of shameless debauchery, and the most divine innocence of love, accept all the characters, prostitutes and virgins, princes and mountebanks, pass quickly from trivial buffoonery to lyrical sublimities, listen alternately to the quibbles of clowns and the songs of lovers. The drama even, in order to imitate and satisfy the prolixity of their nature, must take all tongues, pompous, inflated verse, loaded with imagery, and side by side with this, vulgar prose: more, it must distort its natural style and limits; put songs, poetical devices, in the discourse of courtiers and the speeches of statesmen; bring on the stage the fairy world of the opera, as Middleton says, gnomes, nymphs of the land and sea, with their groves and their meadows; compel the gods to descend upon the stage, and hell itself to furnish its world of marvels. No other theatre is so complicated; for nowhere else do we find men so complete.

III.

In this free and universal expansion, the passions had their special bent withal, which was an English one, inasmuch as they were English. After all, in every age, under every civilisation, a people is always itself. Whatever be its dress, goat-skin blouse, gold-laced doublet, black dress-coat, the five or six great instincts which it possessed in its forests, follow it in its palaces and offices. To this day, warlike passions, a gloomy humour, subsist under the regularity and comfort of modern manners.[2] Their native energy and harshness pierce through the perfection of culture and the habits of comfort. Rich young men, on leaving Oxford, go to hunt bears in Canada, the elephant at the Cape of Good Hope, live under canvas, box, jump hedges on horseback, sail their clippers on dangerous coasts, delight in solitude and peril. The ancient Saxon, the old rover of the Scandinavian seas, have not perished. Even at school the children ill-treat one another, withstand

[1] The great Chancellor Burleigh often wept, so harshly was he used by Elizabeth.

[2] Compare, to understand this character, the parts assigned to James Harlowe by Richardson, old Osborne by Thackeray, Sir Giles Overreach by Massinger, and Manly by Wycherley.

one another, fight like men; and their character is so indomitable, that they need the birch and blows to reduce them to the discipline of law. Judge what they were in the sixteenth century: the English race passed then for 'the most warlike race' of Europe, 'the most redoubtable in battle, the most impatient of anything like slavery.'[1] 'English savages' is what Cellini calls them; and the 'great shins of beef' with which they fill themselves, nourish the force and ferocity of their instincts. To harden them thoroughly, institutions work in the same groove with nature. The nation is armed, every man is brought up like a soldier, bound to have arms according to his condition, to exercise himself on Sundays or holidays; from the yeoman to the lord, the old military constitution keeps them enrolled and ready for action.[2] In a state which resembles an army, it is necessary that punishments, as in an army, shall inspire terror; and to aggravate them, the hideous Wars of the Roses, which on every flaw of the succession are ready to break out again, are ever present in their recollection. Such instincts, such a constitution, such a history, raises before them, with tragic severity, the idea of life: death is at hand, and wounds, the block, tortures. The fine cloaks of purple which the Renaissance of the South displayed joyfully in the sun, to wear like a holiday garment, are here stained with blood, and bordered with black. Throughout,[3] a stern discipline, and the axe ready for every suspicion of treason: great men, bishops, a chancellor, princes, the king's relatives, queens, a protector kneeling in the straw, sprinkled the Tower with their blood; one after the other they marched past, stretched out their necks; the Duke of Buckingham, Queen Anne Boleyn, Queen Catherine Howard, the Earl of Surrey, Admiral Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, Lady Jane Grey and her husband, the Duke of Northumberland, Mary Stuart, the Earl of Essex, all on the throne, or on the steps of the throne, in the highest rank of honours, beauty, youth, and genius: of the bright procession nothing is left but senseless trunks, marred by the tender mercies of the executioner. Shall I count the funeral pyres, the hangings, living men cut down from the gibbet, disembowelled, quartered,[4] their limbs cast into the fire, their heads exposed on the walls? There is a page in Holinshed which reads like a death register:

'The five and twentith daie of Maie (1535), was in saint Paules church at London examined nineteene men and six women born in Holland, whose opinions were (heretical). Fourteene of them were condemned, a man and a woman of them were

[1] Hentzner's *Travels;* Benvenuto Cellini. See *passim*, the costumes printed in Venice and Germany: *Bellicosissimi.* Froude, i. pp. 19, 52.

[2] This is not so true of the English now, if it was in the sixteenth century, as it is of continental nations. The French *lycées* are far more military in character than English schools.—Tr.

[3] Froude's *Hist. of England*, vols. i. ii. iii.

[4] 'When his heart was torn out he uttered a deep groan.'—*Execution of Parry;* Strype, iii. 251.

burned in Smithfield, the other twelve were sent to other townes, there to be burnt. On the nineteenth of June were three moonkes of the Charterhouse hanged, drawne, and quartered at Tiburne, and their heads and quarters set up about London, for denieng the king to be supreme head of the church. Also the one and twentith of the same moneth, and for the same cause, doctor John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, was beheaded for denieng of the supremacie, and his head set upon London bridge, but his bodie buried within Barking churchyard. The pope had elected him a cardinall, and sent his hat as far as Calis, but his head was off before his hat was on: so that they met not. On the sixt of Julie was Sir Thomas Moore beheaded for the like crime, that is to wit, for denieng the king to be supreme head.'[1]

None of these murders seem extraordinary; the chroniclers mention them without growing indignant; the condemned go quietly to the block, as if the thing were perfectly natural. Anne Boleyn said seriously, before giving up her head to the executioner: 'I praie God save the king, and send him long to reigne over you, for a gentler, nor a more mercifull prince was there never.'[2] Society is, as it were, in a state of siege, so strained that beneath the idea of order every one entertained the idea of the scaffold. They saw it, the terrible machine, planted on all the highways of human life; and the byways as well as the highways led to it. A sort of martial law, introduced by conquests into civil affairs, entered thence into ecclesiastical matters,[3] and social economy ended by being enslaved by it. As in a camp,[4] expenditure, dress, the food of each class, are fixed and restricted; no one might stray out of his district, be idle, live after his own devices. Every stranger was seized, interrogated; if he could not give a good account of himself, the parish-stocks bruised his limbs, as in a regiment he passed for a spy and an enemy. Any person, says the law,[5] found living idly or loiteringly for the space of three days, shall be marked with a hot iron on his breast, and adjudged as a slave to the man who shall inform against him. This one 'shall take the same slave, and give him bread, water, or small drink, and refuse meat, and cause him to work, by beating, chaining, or otherwise, in such work and labour as he shall put him to, be it never so vile.' He may sell him, bequeath him, let him out for hire, or trade upon him 'after the like sort as they may do of any other their moveable goods or chattels,' put a ring of iron about his neck or leg; if he runs away and absents himself for fourteen days, he is branded on the forehead with a hot iron, and remains a slave for the whole of his life; if he runs away a second time, he is put to death. Sometimes, says More, you might see a score of thieves hung on the same gibbet. In one year[6] forty persons were put to death in the county of Somerset alone, and in each county there were three or

[1] Holinshed, *Chronicles of England*, iii. p. 793.
[2] *Ibid.* iii. p. 797.
[3] Under Henry IV. and Henry V.
[4] Froude, i. 15.
[5] In 1547. *Pict. History*, ii. 467.
[6] In 1596. *Pict. History*, ii. 907.

four hundred vagabonds who would gather together and rob in armed bands of sixty at a time. Follow the whole of this history closely, the fires of Mary, the pillories of Elizabeth, and it is plain that the moral tone of the land, like its physical condition, is harsh by comparison with all its neighbours. They have no relish in their enjoyments, as in Italy; what is called Merry England is England given up to animal ecstasy, a coarse animation produced by abundant feeding, continued prosperity, courage, and self-reliance; voluptuousness does not exist in this climate and this race. Mingled with the beautiful popular beliefs, the lugubrious dreams and the cruel nightmare of witchcraft make their appearance. Bishop Jewell, preaching before the queen, tells her that witches and sorcerers within these few last years are marvellously increased. Some ministers assert

'That they have had in their parish at one instant, xvij or xviij witches; meaning such as could worke miracles supernaturallie; that they work spells by which men pine away even unto death, their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft; that instructed by the devil, they make ointments of the bowels and members of children, whereby they ride in the aire, and accomplish all their desires. When a child is not baptized, or defended by the sign of the cross, then the witches catch them from their mothers sides in the night . . . kill them . . . or after buriall steale them out of their graves, and seeth them in a caldron, until their flesh be made potable. . . . It is an infallible rule, that everie fortnight, or at the least everie moneth, each witch must kill one child at the least for hir part.'

Here was something to make the teeth chatter with fright. Add to this revolting and absurd description, wretched tomfooleries, details about the infernal cauldron, all the nastinesses which could haunt the trivial imagination of a hideous and drivelling old woman, and you have the spectacles, provided by Middleton and Shakspeare, and which suit the sentiments of the age and the national humour. The fundamental gloom pierces through the glow and rapture of poetry. Mournful legends have multiplied; every churchyard has its ghost; wherever a man has been murdered his spirit appears. Many dare not leave their village after sunset. In the evening, before bed-time, people talk of the coach which is seen drawn by headless horses, with headless postilions and coachmen, or of unhappy spirits who, compelled to inhabit the plain, under the sharp north-east wind, pray for the shelter of a hedge or a valley. They dream terribly of death:

'To die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst

Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!'[1]

The greatest speak with a sad resignation of the infinite obscurity which embraces our poor, short, glimmering life, our life, which is but a troubled dream;[2] the sad state of humanity, which is but passion, madness, and sorrow; the human being who is himself, perhaps, but a vain phantom, a grievous sick man's dream. In their eyes we roll down a fatal slope, where chance dashes us one against the other, and the destiny which drives us, only shatters after it has blinded us. And at the end of all is 'the silent grave, no conversation, no joyful tread of friends, no voice of lovers, no careful father's counsel; nothing's heard, nor nothing is, but all oblivion, dust, and endless darkness.'[3] If yet there were nothing, 'to die, to sleep; to sleep, perchance to dream.' To dream sadly, to fall into a nightmare like the nightmare of life, like that in which we are struggling and crying to-day, panting with hoarse throat!—this is their idea of man and of existence, the national idea, which fills the stage with calamities and despair, which makes a display of tortures and massacres, which abounds in folly and crime, which holds up death as the issue throughout. A threatening and sombre fog veils their mind like their sky, and joy, like the sun, only pierces through it, and upon them, strongly and at intervals. They are different from the Latin race, and in the common Renaissance they are regenerated otherwise than the Latin races. The free and full development of the pure nature which, in Greece and Italy, ends in the painting of beauty and happy energy, ends here in the painting of ferocious energy, agony, and death.

IV.

Thus was this theatre produced; a theatre unique in history, like the admirable and fleeting epoch from which it sprang, the work and the picture of this young world, as natural, as unshackled, and as tragic as itself. When an original and national drama springs up, the poets who establish it, carry in themselves the sentiments which it represents. They display better than other men the public spirit, because the public spirit is stronger in them than in other men. The passions which surround them, break forth in their heart with a harsher or a juster cry, and hence their voices become the voices of all. Chivalric and Catholic Spain had her interpreters in her enthusiasts and her Don Quixotes: in Calderon, first a soldier, afterwards a priest; in Lope de Vega, a volunteer at fifteen, a passionate lover, a wandering duellist, a soldier

[1] Shakspeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act iii. 1. See also *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*.

[2] 'We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.'—*Tempest*, iv. 1.

[3] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret*, Act iv. 1.

of the Armada, finally, a priest and familiar of the Holy Office; so ardent that he fasts till he is exhausted, faints with emotion while singing mass, and in his flagellations stains the walls of his cell with blood. Calm and noble Greece had in her principal tragic poet one of the most accomplished and fortunate of her sons:[1] Sophocles, first in song and palæstra; who at fifteen sang, unclad, the pæan before the trophy of Salamis, and who afterwards, as ambassador, general, ever loving the gods and impassioned for his state, offered, in his life as in his works, the spectacle of the incomparable harmony which made the beauty of the ancient world, and which the modern world will never more attain to. Eloquent and worldly France, in the age which carried the art of decency and conversation to its highest pitch, finds, to unite her oratorical tragedies and to paint her drawing-room passions, the most able craftsman of words: Racine, a courtier, a man of the world; the most capable, by the delicacy of his tact and the adaptation of his style, of making men of the world and courtiers speak. Equally in England the poets are in harmony with their works. Almost all are Bohemians, born of the people,[2] yet educated, and for the most part having studied at Oxford or Cambridge, but poor, so that their education contrasts with their condition. Ben Jonson is the step-son of a bricklayer, and himself a bricklayer; Marlowe is the son of a shoemaker; Shakspeare of a woollen merchant; Massinger of a servant.[3] They live as they can, get into debt, write for their bread, go on the stage. Peele, Lodge, Marlowe, Jonson, Shakspeare, Heywood, are actors; most of the details which we have of their lives are taken from the journal of Henslowe, an old pawnbroker, later a money-lender and manager of a theatre, who gives them work, advances money to them, receives their manuscripts or their wardrobes as security.... For a play he gives seven or eight pounds; after the year 1600 prices rise, and reach as high as twenty or twenty-five pounds. It is clear that, even after this increase, the trade of author scarcely brings in bread. In order to earn money, it was necessary, like Shakspeare, to become a manager, to try to have a share in the property of a theatre; but the case is rare, and the life which they lead, a life of comedians and actors, improvident, full of excess, lost amid debauchery and acts of violence, amidst women of evil fame, in contact with young profligates, in provocations and misery, imagination and licence, generally leads

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[1] Διεπονήθη δὲ ἐν παισὶ καὶ περὶ παλαίστραν καὶ μουσικήν, ἐξ ὧν ἀμφοτέρων ἐστεφανώθη . . . Φιλαθηναιότατος καὶ θεοφιλής.—SCHOLIAST.

[2] Except Beaumont and Fletcher.

[3] Hartley Coleridge, in his *Introduction to the Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford*, says of Massinger's father: 'We are not certified in the situation which he held in the noble household (Earl of Pembroke), but we may be sure that it was neither menial nor mean. Service in those days was not derogatory to gentle birth.'—TR.

them to exhaustion, poverty, and death. Men received enjoyment from them, and neglected and despised them. One actor, for a political allusion, was sent to prison, and only just escaped losing his ears; great men, men in office, abused them like servants. Heywood, who played almost every day, bound himself, in addition, to write a sheet daily, composes wretchedly in the taverns, labours and sweats like a true literary hack, and dies leaving two hundred and twenty pieces, of which most are lost. Kyd, one of the first, died in misery. Shirley, one of the last, at the end of his career, was obliged to become again a schoolmaster. Massinger dies unknown; and in the parish register we find only this sad mention of him: 'Philip Massinger, a stranger.' A few months after the death of Middleton, his widow was obliged to ask alms of the City, because he had left nothing. Imagination, as Drummond said of Ben Jonson, oppressed their reason; it is the common failing of poets. They wish to enjoy, and give themselves wholly up to enjoyments; their mood, their heart governs them; in their life, as in their works, impulses are irresistible; desire comes suddenly, like a wave, drowning reason, resistance—often even giving neither reason nor resistance time to show themselves.[1] Many are roysterers, sad roysterers of the same sort, as Musset and Murger, who give themselves up to every passion, and shake off restraint; capable of the purest and most poetic dreams, of the most delicate and touching tenderness, and who yet can only undermine their health and mar their glory. Such are Nash, Decker, and Greene; Nash, a fanciful satirist, who abused his talent, and conspired like a prodigal against good fortune; Decker, who passed three years in the King's Bench prison; Greene, above all, a pleasing wit, rich, graceful, who gave himself up to all pleasures, publicly with tears confessing his vices,[2] and the next moment plunging into them again. These are mere androgynes, simple courtesans, in manners, body, and heart. Quitting Cambridge, 'with good fellows as free-living as himself,' Greene had travelled over Spain, Italy, 'in which places he sawe and practizde such villainie as is abhominable to declare.' You see the poor man is candid, not sparing himself; he is natural; passionate in everything, repentance or otherwise; eminently inconstant; made for self-contradiction, not self-correction. On his return he became, in London, a supporter of taverns, a haunter of evil places. In his *Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* he says:

[1] See, amongst others, *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, by Heywood. Mrs. Frankfort, so upright of heart, accepts Wendoll at his first offer. Sir Francis Acton, at the sight of her whom he wishes to dishonour, and whom he hates, falls 'into an ecstasy,' and dreams of nothing save marriage. Compare the sudden transport of Juliet, Romeo, Macbeth, Miranda, etc.; the counsel of Prospero to Fernando, when he leaves him alone for a moment with Miranda.

[2] Compare *La Vie de Bohême* and *Les Nuits d'Hiver*, by Murger; *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*, by A. de Musset.

'I was dround in pride, whoredom was my daily exercise, and gluttony with drunkenness was my onely delight. . . . After I had wholly betaken me to the penning of plaies (which was my continuall exercise), I was so far from calling upon God that I sildome thought on God, but tooke such delight in swearing and blaspheming the name of God that none could thinke otherwise of me than that I was the child of perdition. These vanities and other trifling pamphlets I penned of love and vaine fantasies was my chiefest stay of living; and for those my vaine discourses I was beloved of the more vainer sort of people, who being my continuall companions, came still to my lodging, and there would continue quaffing, carowsing, and surfeting with me all the day long. . . . If I may have my disire while I live I am satisfied; let me shift after death as I may. . . . "Hell!" quoth I; "what talke you of hell to me? I know if I once come there I shall have the company of better men than myselfe; I shal also meete with some madde knaves in that place, and so long as I shall not sit there alone, my care is the lesse. . . . If I feared the judges of the bench no more than I dread the judgments of God, I would before I slept dive into one carles bagges or other, and make merrie with the shelles I found in them so long as they would last."'

A little later he is seized with remorse, marries, depicts in delicious lines the regularity and calm of an upright life; then returns to London, devours his property and his wife's fortune with 'a sorry ragged queane,' in the company of ruffians, pimps, sharpers, courtesans; drinking, blaspheming, wearing himself out by sleepless nights and orgies; writing for bread sometimes amid the brawling and effluvia of his wretched lodging, lighting upon thoughts of adoration and love, worthy of Rolla;[1] very often disgusted with himself, seized with a fit of weeping between two alehouses, and writing little pieces to accuse himself, to regret his wife, to convert his comrades, or to warn young people against the tricks of prostitutes and swindlers. By this process he was soon worn out; six years were enough to exhaust him. An indigestion arising from Rhenish wine and pickled herrings finished him. If it had not been for his hostess, who succoured him, he 'would have perished in the streets.' He lasted a little longer, and then his light went out; now and then he begged her 'pittifully for a penny pott of malmesie;' he was covered with lice, he had but one shirt, and when his own was 'a washing,' he was obliged to borrow her husband's. 'His doublet and hose and sword were sold for three shillinges,' and the poor folks paid the cost of his burial, four shillings for the winding-sheet, and six and fourpence for the burial. In such low places, on such dunghills, amid such excesses and violence, dramatic genius forced its way, and amongst others, that of the first, of the most powerful, of the true founder of the dramatic school, Christopher Marlowe.

Marlowe was an ill-regulated, dissolute, outrageously vehement and audacious spirit, but grand and sombre, with the genuine poetic frenzy; pagan moreover, and rebellious in manners and creed. In this universal return to the senses, and in this impulse of natural forces which brought on the Renaissance, the corporeal instincts and the ideas

[1] The hero of one of Alfred de Musset's poems.—TR.

which give them their warrant, break forth impetuously. Marlowe, like Greene, like Kett,[1] is a sceptic, denies God and Christ, blasphemes the Trinity, declares Moses 'a juggler,' Christ more worthy of death than Barabbas, says that 'yf he wer to write a new religion, he wolde undertake both a more excellent and more admirable methode,' and 'almost in every company he commeth, perswadeth men to Athiesme.'[2] Such were the rages, the rashnesses, the excesses which liberty of thought gave rise to in these new minds, who for the first time, after so many centuries, dared to walk unfettered. From his father's shop, crowded with children, from the stirrups and awls, he found himself at Cambridge, probably through the patronage of a great man, and on his return to London, in want, amid the licence of the green-room, the low houses and taverns, his head was in a ferment, and his passions were heated. He turned actor; but having broken his leg in a scene of debauchery, he remained lame, and could no longer appear on the boards. He openly avowed his infidelity, and a prosecution was begun, which, if time had not failed, would probably have brought him to the stake. He made love to a drab, and trying to stab his rival, his hand was turned, so that his own blade entered his eye and his brain, and he died, still cursing and blaspheming. He was only thirty years old. Think what poetry could emanate from a life so passionate, and occupied in such a manner! First, exaggerated declamation, heaps of murder, atrocities, a pompous and furious display of tragedy soaked in blood, and passions raised to a pitch of madness. All the foundations of the English stage, *Ferrex and Porrex*, *Cambyses*, *Hieronymo*, even the *Pericles* of Shakspeare, reach the same height of extravagance, force, and horror.[3] It is the first outbreak of youth. Recall Schiller's *Robbers*, and how modern democracy has recognised for the first time its picture in the metaphors and cries of Charles Moor.[4] So here the characters struggle and jostle, stamp on the earth, gnash their teeth, shake their fists against heaven. The trumpets sound, the drums beat, coats of mail file past, armies clash together, men stab each other, or themselves; speeches are full of gigantic threats or lyrical figures;[5]

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[1] Burnt in 1589.

[2] The translator always refers to Marlowe's *Works*, ed. Dyce, 3 vols., 1850. Append. i. vol. 3.

[3] See especially *Titus Andronicus*, attributed to Shakspeare: there are parricides, mothers whom they cause to eat their children, a young girl who appears on the stage violated, with her tongue and hands cut off.

[4] The chief character in Schiller's *Robbers*, a virtuous brigand and redresser of wrongs.—TR.

[5] For in a field, whose superficies
Is cover'd with a liquid purple veil,
And sprinkled with the brains of slaughter'd men,
My royal chair of state shall be advanc'd;
And he that means to place himself therein,

kings die, straining a bass voice; 'now doth ghastly death with greedy talons gripe my bleeding heart, and like a harpy tires on my life.' The hero in *Tamburlaine the Great*[1] is seated on a chariot drawn by chained kings, burns towns, drowns women and children, puts men to the sword, and finally, seized with an invisible sickness, raves in monstrous outcries against the gods, whose hands afflict his soul, and whom he would fain dethrone. There already is the picture of senseless pride, of blind and murderous rage, which passing through many devastations, at last arms against heaven itself. The overflowing of savage and immoderate instinct produces this mighty sounding verse, this prodigality of carnage, this display of overloaded splendours and colours, this railing of demoniac passions, this audacity of grand impiety. If in the dramas which succeed it, *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Jew of Malta*, the bombast decreases, the violence remains. Barabas the Jew, maddened with hate, is thenceforth no longer human; he has been treated by the Christians like a beast, and he hates them like a beast. He advises his servant Ithamore in the following words:

'Hast thou no trade? then listen to my words,
And I will teach thee that shall stick by thee:
First, be thou void of these affections,
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear;
Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none,
But to thyself smile when the Christians moan.
. . . I walk abroad a-nights,
And kill sick people groaning under walls:
Sometimes I go about and poison wells. . . .
Being young, I studied physic, and began
To practise first upon the Italian;
There I enrich'd the priests with burials,
And always kept the sexton's arms in ure
With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells. . . .
I fill'd the jails with bankrouts in a year,
And with young orphans planted hospitals;
And every moon made some or other mad,
And now and then one hang himself for grief,
Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll
How I with interest tormented him.'[2]

Must armed wade up to the chin in blood. . . .
And I would strive to swim through pools of blood,
Or make a bridge of murder'd carcasses,
Whose arches should be fram'd with bones of Turks,
Ere I would lose the title of a king.—*Tamburlaine*, part ii. i. 3.

[1] The editor of Marlowe's *Works*, Pickering, 1826, says in his Introduction: 'Both the matter and style of *Tamburlaine*, however, differ materially from Marlowe's other compositions, and doubts have more than once been suggested as to whether the play was properly assigned to him. We think that Marlowe did not write it.' Dyce is of a contrary opinion.—TR.

[2] Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, ii. p. 275 *et passim*.

All these cruelties he boasts of and chuckles over, like a demon who rejoices in being a good executioner, and plunges his victims in the very extremity of anguish. His daughter has two Christian suitors; and by forged letters he causes them to slay each other. In despair she takes the veil, and to avenge himself he poisons his daughter and the whole convent. Two friars wish to denounce him, then to convert him; he strangles the first, and jokes with his slave Ithamore, a cut-throat by profession, who loves his trade, rubs his hands with joy, and says:

'Pull amain,
'Tis neatly done, sir; here's no print at all.
So, let him lean upon his staff; excellent! he stands as if
he were begging of bacon.'[1]
'O mistress, I have the bravest, gravest, secret, subtle, bottle-
nosed knave to my master, that ever gentleman had.'[2]

The second friar comes up, and they accuse him of the murder:

'*Barabas.* Heaven bless me! what, a friar a murderer!
When shall you see a Jew commit the like?
Ithamore. Why, a Turk could ha' done no more.
Bar. To-morrow is the sessions; you shall to it—
Come Ithamore, let's help to take him hence.
Friar. Villains, I am a sacred person; touch me not.
Bar. The law shall touch you; we'll but lead you, we:
'Las, I could weep at your calamity!'[3]

Add to that two other poisonings, an infernal machine to blow up the Turkish garrison, a plot to cast the Turkish commander in a well. Barabas falls into it himself, and dies in the hot cauldron,[4] howling, hardened, remorseless, having but one regret, that he had not done evil enough. These are the ferocities of the middle-age; we might find them to this day among the companions of Ali Pacha, among the pirates of the Archipelago; we retain pictures of them in the paintings of the fifteenth century, which represent a king with his court, seated calmly round a living man who is being flayed; in the midst the flayer on his knees is working conscientiously, very careful not to spoil the skin.[5]

All this is rough work, you will say; these people kill too readily, and too quickly. It is on this very account that the painting is a true one. For the specialty of the men of the time, as of Marlowe's characters, is the abrupt commission of a deed; they are children, robust children. As a horse kicks out instead of speaking, so they pull out their knives instead of an explanation. Nowadays we hardly know what nature is; we still keep in its place the benevolent prejudices of the eighteenth century; we only see it humanised by two centuries of culture, and we take its acquired calm for an innate moderation. The foundation of the natural man are irresistible impulses, passions, desires,

[1] *The Jew of Malta*, iv. p. 311. [2] *Ibid.* iii. p. 291. [3] *Ibid.* iv. p. 313.
[4] Up to this time, in England, poisoners were cast into a boiling cauldron.
[5] In the Museum of Ghent.

greeds; all blind. He sees a woman,[1] thinks her beautiful; suddenly he rushes towards her; people try to restrain him, he kills these people, gluts his passion, then thinks no more of it, save when at times a vague picture of a moving lake of blood crosses his brain and makes him gloomy. Sudden and extreme resolves are confused in his mind with desire; barely conceived of, the thing is done; the wide interval which a Frenchman places between the idea of an action and the action itself is not to be found here.[2] Barabas conceived murders, and straightway murders were accomplished; there is no deliberation, no pricks of conscience; that is how he commits a score of them; his daughter leaves him, he becomes unnatural, and poisons her; his confidential servant betrays him, he disguises himself, and poisons him. Rage seizes these men like a fit, and then they are forced to kill. Benvenuto Cellini relates how, being offended, he tried to restrain himself, but was nearly suffocated; and that he might not die of the torments, he rushed with his dagger upon his opponent. So, in *Edward II.*, the nobles immediately appeal to arms; all is excessive and unforeseen; between two replies the heart is turned upside down, transported to the extremes of hate or tenderness. Edward, seeing his favourite Gaveston again, pours out before him his treasure, casts his dignities at his feet, gives him his seal, himself, and, on a threat from the Bishop of Coventry, suddenly cries:

> 'Throw off his golden mitre, rend his stole,
> And in the channel christen him anew.'[3]

Then, when the queen supplicates:

> 'Fawn not on me, French strumpet! get thee gone . . .
> Speak not unto her: let her droop and pine.'[4]

Furies and hatreds clash together like horsemen in a battle. The Duke of Lancaster draws his sword on Gaveston to slay him, before the king; Mortimer wounds Gaveston. These powerful loud voices growl; the noblemen will not even let a dog approach the prince, and rob them of their rank. Lancaster says of Gaveston:

> '. . . He comes not back,
> Unless the sea cast up his shipwrack'd body.
> *Warwick.* And to behold so sweet a sight as that,
> There's none here but would run his horse to death.'[5]

They have seized Gaveston, and intend to hang him 'at a bough;' they refuse to let him speak a single minute with the king. In vain they

[1] See in the *Jew of Malta* the seduction of Ithamore, by Bellamira, a rough, but truly admirable picture.

[2] Nothing could be falser than Schiller's *William Tell*, his hesitation and arguments; for a contrast, see Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*. In 1377, Wiclif pleaded in St. Paul's before the Bishop of London, and that raised a quarrel. The Duke of Lancaster, Wiclif's protector, 'threatened to drag the bishop out of the church by the hair;' and next day the furious crowd sacked the duke's palace. *Pict. Hist.* i. 780.

[3] Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, i. p. 173. [4] *Ibid.* p. 186. [5] *Ibid.* p. 188.

are entreated; when they do at last consent, they recall their promise; it is a prey they want immediately, and Warwick, seizing him by force, 'strake off his head in a trench.' Those are the men of the middle-age. They have the fierceness, the rage, the pride of big, well-fed, thorough-bred bull-dogs. It is this sternness and impetuosity of primitive passions which produced the Wars of the Roses, and for thirty years drove the nobles on each other's swords and to the block.

What is there beyond all these frenzies and gluttings of blood? The idea of crushing necessity and inevitable ruin in which everything sinks and comes to an end. Mortimer, brought to the block, says with a smile:

> 'Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel
> There is a point, to which when men aspire,
> They tumble headlong down: that point I touch'd,
> And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
> Why should I grieve at my declining fall?—
> Farewell, fair queen; weep not for Mortimer,
> That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,
> Goes to discover countries yet unknown.'[1]

Weigh well these grand words; they are a cry from the heart, the profound confession of Marlowe, as also of Byron, and of the old sea-kings. The northern paganism is fully expressed in this heroic and mournful sigh; it is thus they imagine the world so long as they remain on the outside of Christianity, or as soon as they quit it. So also, when they see in life but a battle of unchecked passions, and in death but a gloomy sleep, perhaps filled with mournful dreams, there is no other supreme good but a day of joy and victory. They glut themselves, shutting their eyes to the issue, except that they may be swallowed up on the morrow. That is the master-thought of *Doctor Faustus*, the greatest of Marlowe's dramas; to satisfy his soul, no matter at what price, or with what results:

> 'A sound magician is a mighty god. . . .
> How I am glutted with conceit of this! . . .
> I'll have them fly to India for gold,
> Ransack the ocean for orient pearl. . . .
> I'll have them read me strange philosophy,
> And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;
> I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,
> And make swift Rhine circle fair Wertenberg. . . .
> Like lions shall they guard us when we please;
> Like Almain rutters with their horsemen's staves,
> Or Lapland giants, trotting by our sides;
> Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,
> Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
> Than have the white breasts of the queen of love.'[2]

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[1] *Edward the Second*, last scene, p. 288.

[2] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, i. p. 9 *et passim*.

What brilliant dreams, what desires, what vast or voluptuous wishes, worthy of a Roman Cæsar or an eastern poet, eddy in this teeming brain! To satiate them, to obtain four-and-twenty years of power, Faustus gives his soul, without fear, without need of temptation, at the first outset, voluntarily, so sharp is the prick within:

> 'Had I as many souls as there be stars,
> I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.
> By him I'll be great emperor of the world,
> And make a bridge thorough the moving air. . . .
> Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thy own?'[1]

And with that he gives himself full swing: he wants to know everything, to have everything; a book in which he can behold all herbs and trees which grow upon the earth; another in which shall be drawn all the constellations and planets; another which shall bring him gold when he wills it, and 'the fairest courtezans;' another which summons 'men in armour' ready to execute his commands, and which holds 'thunder, whirlwinds, thunder and lightning' chained at his disposal. He is like a child, he stretches out his hands for everything shining; then grieves to think of hell, then lets himself be diverted by shows:

> '*Faustus.* O, this feeds my soul!
> *Lucifer.* Tut, Faustus, in hell is all manner of delight.
> *Faustus.* Oh, might I see hell, and return again,
> How happy were I then!' . . .[2]

He is conducted, being invisible, over the whole world; lastly to Rome, amongst the ceremonies of the Pope's court. Like a schoolboy during a holiday, he has insatiable eyes, he forgets everything before a pageant, he amuses himself in playing tricks, in giving the Pope a box on the ear, in beating the monks, in performing magic tricks before princes, finally in drinking, feasting, filling his belly, deadening his thoughts. In his transport he becomes an atheist, and says there is no hell, that those are 'old wives' tales.' Then suddenly the sad idea knocks at the gates of his brain:

> 'I will renounce this magic, and repent . . .
> My heart's so harden'd, I cannot repent:
> Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
> But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
> "Faustus, thou art damn'd!" then swords, and knives,
> Poison, guns, halters, and envenom'd steel
> Are laid before me to despatch myself,
> Had not sweet pleasure conquer'd deep despair.
> Have not I made blind Homer sing to me
> Of Alexander's love and Œnon's death?
> And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes
> With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
> Made music with my Mephistophilis?
> Why should I die, then, or basely despair?

[1] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, i. pp. 22, 29.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 43.

I am resolv'd; Faustus shall ne'er repent.—
Come Mephistophilis, let us dispute again,
And argue of divine astrology.
Tell me, are there many heavens above the moon?
Are all celestial bodies but one globe,
As is the substance of this centric earth? . . .'[1]
'One thing . . . let me crave of thee
To glut the longing of my heart's desire. . . .
Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss!
Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!—
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena. . . .
O thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars!'[2]

'Ah, my God, I would weep! but the devil draws in my tears. Gush forth blood, instead of tears! yea, life and soul! Oh, he stays my tongue! I would lift up my hands; but see, they hold them, they hold them; Lucifer and Mephistophilis.' . . .[3]

'Ah, Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually!
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come. . . .
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.
Oh, I'll leap up to my God!—Who pulls me down?—
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ,
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him. . . .
Ah, half the hour is past! 'twill all be past anon. . . .
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd. . . .
It strikes, it strikes. . . .
Oh soul, be chang'd into little water-drops,
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found!'[4]

There is the living, struggling, natural, personal man, not the philosophic type which Goethe has created, but a primitive and genuine man, hot-headed, fiery, the slave of his passions, the sport of his dreams, wholly engrossed in the present, moulded by his lusts, contradictions, and follies, who amidst noise and starts, cries of pleasure and anguish, rolls, knowing it and willing it, down the slope and crags of his precipice. The whole English drama is here, as a plant in its seed, and Marlowe is to Shakspeare what Perugino was to Raphael.

[1] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 37. [2] *Ibid.* p. 75. [3] *Ibid.* p. 78. [4] *Ibid.* p. 80.

V.

Insensibly art is being formed; and toward the close of the century it is complete. Shakspeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Jonson, Webster, Massinger, Ford, Middleton, Heywood, appear together, or close upon each other, a new and favoured generation, flourishing largely in the soil fertilised by the efforts of the generation which preceded them. Thenceforth the scenes are developed and assume consistency; the characters cease to move by clockwork, the drama is no longer like a piece of statuary. The poet who just before knew only how to strike or kill, introduces now a sequence of situation and a rationale in intrigue. He begins to prepare the way for sentiments, to forewarn us of events, to combine effects, and we find a theatre at last, the most complete, the most life-like, and also the most strange that ever existed.

We must follow its formation, and regard the drama on the ground where it was formed, namely, in the mind of its authors. What was going on in these minds? What sorts of ideas were born there, and how were they born? In the first place, they see the event, whatever it be, and they see it as it is; I mean that they have it within themselves, with its persons and details, beautiful and ugly, even dull and grotesque. If it is a trial, the judge is there, in their minds, in such a place, with his physiognomy and his warts; the pleader in such a place, with his spectacles and brief-bag; the accused is opposite, stooping and remorseful; each with his friends, cobblers, or lords; then the buzzing crowd behind, all with their grinning faces, their astonished or kindling eyes.[1] It is a genuine trial which they imagine, a trial like those they have seen before the justice, where they cried or shouted as witnesses or interested parties, with their quibbling terms, their pros and cons, the scribblings, the sharp voices of the counsel, the stamping of feet, the crowding, the smell of their fellow-men, and so forth. The endless myriads of circumstances which accompany and obscure every event, crowd round that event in their heads, and not merely the externals, that is, the sensible and picturesque traits, the particular colours and costumes, but also, and chiefly, the internals, that is, the motions of anger and joy, the secret tumult of the soul, the ebb and flow of ideas and passions which darken the face, swell the veins, and make the teeth grind, the fists clench, which urge or restrain a man. They see all the details, the tides that sway a man, one from without, another from within, one over another, one within another, both together without faltering and without ceasing. And what is this vision but sympathy, an imitative sympathy, which puts us in another's place, which carries over their agitations to our own breasts, which makes our life a little world, able to reproduce the great one in abstract? Like the characters they imagine, poets and spectators

[1] See the trial of Vittoria Corombona, of Virginia in Webster, of Coriolanus and Julius Cæsar in Shakspeare.

make gestures, raise their voices, act. No speech or story can show their inner mood, but it is the getting up of the play which can manifest it. As some men find language for their ideas, so these act and mimic them; theatrical and figured representation is their genuine speech: all other expression, the lyrical song of Æschylus, the reflective symbolism of Goethe, the oratorical development of Racine, would be impossible for them. Involuntarily, instantaneously, without forecast, they cut life into scenes, and carry it in pieces on the boards; this goes so far, that often a mere character becomes an actor,[1] playing a part within a part; the scenic faculty is the natural form of their mind. Under the effort of this instinct, all the accessory parts of the drama come before the footlights and expand under our eyes. A battle has been fought; instead of relating it, they bring it before the public, trumpets and drums, mingling crowds, slaughtering combatants. A shipwreck happens; straightway the ship is before the spectator, with the sailors' oaths, the technical orders of the helmsman. Of all the details of human life,[2] tavern-racket and statesmen's councils, scullion jests and court processions, domestic tenderness and pandering,—none is too small or too high: these things exist in life—let them exist on the stage, each in full, in the rough, atrocious, or absurd, just as it is, no matter how. Neither in Greece, nor Italy, nor Spain, nor France, has an art been seen which tried so boldly to express the soul, with the soul's most intimate relations—the truth, and the whole truth.

How did they succeed, and what is this new art which confounds all ordinary rules? It is an art for all that, since it is natural; a great art, since it embraces more things, and that more deeply than others do, like the art of Rembrandt and Rubens; but like theirs, it is a Teutonic art, and one whose every step is in contrast with these of classical art. What the Greeks and Romans, the originators of the latter, sought in everything, was propriety and order, monuments, statues and paintings, the theatre, eloquence and poetry: from Sophocles to Racine, they shaped all their work in the same mould, and attained beauty by the same method. In the infinite entanglement and complexity of things, they grasped a small number of simple ideas, which they embraced in a small number of simple representations, so that the vast confused vegetation of life is presented to the mind from that time forth, pruned and reduced, and perhaps easily embraced by a single glance. A square of walls with rows of similar columns; a symmetrical group of draped or undraped forms; a young upright man raising one arm; a wounded warrior who will not return to the camp, though they beseech him: this, in their noblest epoch, was their architecture, their painting, their sculpture, and their theatre. No poetry but a few sentiments slightly complex, always natural, not toned down, intelligible to

[1] Falstaff in Shakspeare; the queen in *London*, by Greene and Decker; Rosalind in Shakspeare.

[2] In Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* there is an admirable accouchement scene.

all; no eloquence but a continuous argument, a limited vocabulary, the loftiest ideas brought down to their sensible origin, so that children can understand such eloquence and feel such poetry; and in this sense they are classical.[1] In the hands of Frenchmen, the last inheritors of the simple art, these great legacies of antiquity undergo no change. If poetic genius is less, the structure of mind has not altered. Racine puts on the stage a unique action, whose details he proportions, and whose course he regulates; no incident, nothing unforeseen, no appendices or incongruities; no secondary intrigue. The subordinate parts are effaced; at the most four or five principal characters, the fewest possible; the rest, reduced to the condition of confidants, take the tone of their masters, and merely reply to them. All the scenes are held together, and flow insensibly one into the other; and every scene, like the entire piece, has its order and progress. The tragedy is detached symmetrically and clear from the midst of human life, like a complete and solitary temple which limns its regular outline on the luminous azure of the sky. In England all is different. All that the French call proportion and fitness is wanting; Englishmen do not trouble themselves about them, they do not need them. There is no unity; they leap suddenly over twenty years, or five hundred leagues. There are twenty scenes in an act—we stumble without preparation from one to the other, from tragedy to buffoonery; usually it appears as though the action gained no ground; the characters waste their time in conversation, dreaming, expanding their parts. We were moved, anxious for the issue, and here they bring us in quarrelling servants, lovers making poetry. Even the dialogue and speeches, which one would think ought particularly to be of a regular and contained flow of engrossing ideas, remain stagnant, or are scattered in windings and deviations. At first sight we fancy we are not advancing, we do not feel at every phrase that we have made a step. There are none of those solid pleadings, none of those probing discussions, which moment by moment add reason to reason, objection to objection; one would say that they only knew how to scold, to repeat themselves, and to mark time. And the disorder is as great in general as in particular things. They heap a whole reign, a complete war, an entire novel, into a drama; they cut up into scenes an English chronicle or an Italian novel: to this their art is reduced; the events matter little; whatever they are, they accept them. They have no idea of progressive and unique action. Two or three actions connected endwise, or entangled one within another, two or three incomplete endings badly contrived, and opened up again; no machinery but death, scattered right and left and unforeseen: such is the logic of their method. The fact is, that our logic, the Latin, fails them. Their mind does not march

[1] This is, in fact, the English view of the French mind, which is doubtless a refinement, many times refined, of the classical spirit. But M. Taine has seemingly not taken into account such products as the Medea on the one hand, and the works of Aristophanes and the Latin sensualists on the other.—Tr.

by the smooth and straightforward paths of rhetoric and eloquence. It reaches the same end, but by other approaches. It is at once more comprehensive and less regular than ours. It demands a conception more complete, but less consecutive. It proceeds, not as with us, by a line of uniform steps, but by sudden leaps and long pauses. It does not rest satisfied with a simple idea drawn from a complex fact, but exacts the complex fact entire, with its numberless particularities, its interminable ramifications. It would see in man not a general passion—ambition, anger, or love; not a pure quality—happiness, avarice, folly; but a character, that is, the imprint, wonderfully complicated, which inheritance, temperament, education, calling, the age, society, conversation, habits, have stamped on every man; an incommunicable and individual imprint, which, once stamped in a man, is not found again in any other. It would see in the hero not only the hero, but the individual, with his manner of walking, drinking, swearing, blowing his nose; with the tone of his voice, whether he is thin or fat;[1] and thus plunges to the bottom of things, with every look, as by a miner's deep shaft. This sunk, it little cares whether the second shaft be two paces or a hundred from the first; enough that it reaches the same depth, and serves equally well to display the inner and invisible layer. Logic is here from beneath, not from above. It is the unity of a character which binds the two acts of a person, as the unity of an impression connects the two scenes of a drama. To speak exactly, the spectator is like a man whom one should lead along a wall pierced at separate intervals with little windows; at every window he catches for an instant a glimpse of a new landscape, with its million details: the walk over, if he is of Latin race and training, he finds a medley of images jostling in his head, and asks for a map that he may recollect himself; if he is of German race and training, he perceives as a whole, by a natural concentration, the wide country of which he has only seen the fragments. Such a conception, by the multitude of details which it has combined, and by the length of the vistas which it embraces, is a half-vision which shakes the soul. What these works are about to show us is, with what energy, what disdain of contrivance, what vehemence of truth, it dares to smite and hammer the human medal; with what liberty it is able to reproduce the full prominence of indistinct characters, and the extreme flights of virgin nature.

VI.

Let us consider the different personages which this art, so suited to depict real manners, and so apt to paint the living soul, goes in search of amidst the real manners and the living souls of its time and country. They are of two kinds, as befits nature and the drama: one which pro-

[1] See *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, *Hotspur*. The queen in *Hamlet* (v. 2) says: 'He (Hamlet)'s fat, and scant of breath.'

duces terror, the other which produces pity; these graceful and feminine, those manly and violent. All the differences of sex, all the extremes of life, all the resources of the stage, are embraced in this contrast; and if ever there was a complete contrast, it is here.

The reader must study for himself some of these pieces, or he will have no idea of the fury into which the stage is hurled; force and transport are driven every instant to the point of atrocity, and further still, if there is any further. Assassinations, poisonings, tortures, outcries of madness and rage; no passion and no suffering are too extreme for their energy or their effort. Anger is with them a madness, ambition a frenzy, love a delirium. Hippolyto, who has lost his mistress, says, 'Were thine eyes clear as mine, thou might'st behold her, watching upon yon battlements of stars, how I observe them.'[1] Aretus, to be avenged on Valentinian, poisons him after poisoning himself, and with the death-rattle in his throat, is brought to his enemy's side, to give him a foretaste of agony. Queen Brunhalt has panders with her on the stage, and causes her two sons to slay each other. Death everywhere; at the close of every play, all the great people wade in blood: with slaughter and butcheries, the stage becomes a field of battle or a burial-ground.[2] Shall I describe a few of these tragedies? In the *Duke of Milan*, Francesco, to avenge his sister, who has been seduced, wishes to seduce in his turn the Duchess Marcelia, wife of Sforza, the seducer; he desires her, he will have her; he says to her, with cries of love and rage:

> 'For with this arm I'll swim through seas of blood,
> Or make a bridge, arch'd with the bones of men,
> But I will grasp my aims in you, my dearest,
> Dearest, and best of women!'[3]

For he wishes to strike the duke through her, whether she lives or dies, if not by dishonour, at least by murder; the first is as good as the second, nay better, for so he will do a greater injury. He calumniates her, and the duke, who adores her, kills her; then, being undeceived, becomes a madman, will not believe she is dead, has the body brought in, kneels before it, rages and weeps. He knows now the name of the traitor, and at the thought of him he swoons or raves:

> 'I'll follow him to hell, but I will find him,
> And then live a fourth Fury to torment him.
> Then, for this cursed hand and arm that guided
> The wicked steel, I'll have them, joint by joint,
> With burning irons sear'd off, which I will eat,
> I being a vulture fit to taste such carrion.'[4]

Suddenly his speech is stopped, and he falls; Francesco has poisoned

[1] Middleton, *The Honest Whore*, Part i. iv. 1.

[2] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Valentinian, Thierry and Theodoret.* See Massinger's *Picture*, which resembles Musset's *Barberine.* Its crudity, the extraordinary and repulsive energy, will show the difference of the two ages.

[3] Massinger's Works, ed. H. Coleridge, 1859, *Duke of Milan*, ii. 1. [4] *Ibid.* v. 2.

him. The duke dies, and the murderer is led to torture. There are worse scenes than this; to find sentiments strong enough, they go to those which change the nature of man. Massinger puts on the stage a father who judges and condemns his daughter, stabbed by her husband; Webster and Ford, a son who assassinates his mother; Ford, the incestuous loves of a brother and sister.[1] Irresistible love overtakes them; the ancient love of Pasiphaë and Myrrha, a kind of madness-like enchantment, and beneath which the will entirely gives way. Giovanni says:

'Lost! I am lost! My fates have doom'd my death!
The more I strive, I love; the more I love,
The less I hope: I see my ruin certain. . . .
I have even wearied heaven with pray'rs, dried up
The spring of my continual tears, even starv'd
My veins with daily fasts: what wit or art
Could counsel, I have practised; but, alas!
I find all these but dreams, and old men's tales,
To fright unsteady youth: I am still the same;
Or I must speak, or burst.'[2]

What transports follow! what fierce and bitter joys, and how short too, how grievous and crossed with anguish, especially for her! She is married to another. Read for yourself the admirable and horrible scene which represents the wedding night. She is pregnant, and Soranzo, the husband, drags her along the ground, with curses, demanding the name of her lover:

'Come strumpet, famous whore! . . .
Harlot, rare, notable harlot,
That with thy brazen face maintain'st thy sin,
Was there no man in Parma to be bawd
To your loose cunning whoredom else but I?
Must your hot itch and pleurisy of lust,
The heyday of your luxury, be fed
Up to a surfeit, and could none but I
Be pick'd out to be cloak to your close tricks,
Your belly-sports?—Now I must be the dad
To all that gallimaufry that is stuff'd
In thy corrupted bastard-bearing womb?
Why, must I?
Annabella. Beastly man! why?—'tis thy fate.
I sued not to thee. . . .
S. Tell me by whom.'[3]

She gets excited, feels and cares for nothing more, refuses to tell the name of her lover, and praises him in the following words:

[1] Massinger, *The Fatal Dowry;* Webster and Ford, *A late Murther of the Sonne upon the Mother* (a play not extant); Ford, *'Tis pity she's a Whore.* See also Ford's *Broken Heart,* with its sublime scenes of agony and madness.

[2] Ford's Works, ed. H. Coleridge, 1859, *'Tis pity she's a Whore,* i. 3.

[3] *Ibid.* iv. 3.

'*A.* Soft, 'twas not in my bargain.
Yet somewhat, sir, to stay your longing stomach
I am content t' acquaint you with: the Man,
The more than man, that got this sprightly boy,—
(For 'tis a boy, and therefore glory, sir,
Your heir shall be a son.)
S. Damnable monster!
A. Nay, an you will not hear, I'll speak no more.
S. Yes, speak, and speak thy last.
A. A match, a match! . . .
You, why you are not worthy once to name
His name without true worship, or indeed,
Unless you kneel'd, to hear another name him.
S. What was he call'd?
A. We are not come to that;
Let it suffice that you shall have the glory
To father what so brave a father got. . . .
S. Dost thou laugh?
Come, whore, tell me your lover, or by truth
I'll hew thy flesh to shreds; who is't?'[1]

She laughs; the excess of shame and terror has given her courage; she insults him, she sings; so like a woman!

'*A.* (Sings.) *Che morte piu dolce che morire per amore.*
S. Thus will I pull thy hair, and thus I'll drag
Thy lust be-leper'd body through the dust. . . .
(*Hales her up and down.*)
A. Be a gallant hangman. . . .
I leave revenge behind, and thou shalt feel it. . . .
(*To Vasquez.*) Pish, do not beg for me, I prize my life
As nothing; if the man will needs be mad,
Why, let him take it.'[2]

In the end all is discovered, and the two lovers know they must die. For the last time, they see each other in Annabella's chamber, listening to the noise of the feast below which shall serve for their funeral-feast. Giovanni, who has made his resolve like a madman, sees Annabella richly dressed, dazzling. He regards her in silence, and remembers the past. He weeps, and says:

'These are the funeral tears,
Shed on your grave; these furrow'd up my cheeks
When first I lov'd and knew not how to woo. . . .
Give me your hand: how sweetly life doth run
In these well-colour'd veins! How constantly
These palms do promise health! . . .
Kiss me again, forgive me. . . . Farewell.'[3] . . .

He then stabs her, enters the banqueting room, with her heart upon his dagger:

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[1] *'Tis pity she's a Whore*, iv. 3. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* v. 5.

'Soranzo, see this heart, which was thy wife's.
Thus I exchange it royally for thine.'[1]

He kills him, and casting himself on the swords of banditti, dies. It would seem that tragedy could go no further.

But it did go further; for if these are melodramas, they are sincere, composed, not like those of to-day, by Grub Street writers for peaceful citizens, but by impassioned men, experienced in tragical arts, for a violent, over-fed, melancholy race. From Shakspeare to Milton, Swift, Hogarth, no race has been more glutted with crudities and horrors, and its poets supply them plentifully; Ford less so than Webster; the latter a sombre man, whose thoughts seem incessantly to be haunting tombs and charnel-houses. 'Places in court,' he says, 'are but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower.'[2] Such are his images. No one has equalled Webster in creating desperate characters, utter wretches, bitter misanthropes,[3] in blackening and blaspheming human life, above all, in depicting the shameless depravity and refined ferocity of Italian manners.[4] The Duchess of Malfi has secretly married her steward Antonio, and her brother learns that she has children; almost mad[5] with rage and wounded pride, he remains silent, waiting until he knows the name of the father; then he arrives, means to kill her, but so that she shall taste the lees of death. She must suffer much, but above all she must not die too quickly! She must suffer in mind; these griefs are worse than the body's. He sends assassins to kill Antonio, and meanwhile comes to her in the dark, with affectionate words; pretends to be reconciled, and suddenly shows her waxen figures, covered with wounds, whom she takes for her slaughtered husband and children. She staggers under the blow, and remains in gloom, without crying out. Then she says:

'Good comfortable fellow,
Persuade a wretch that's broke upon the wheel
To have all his bones new set; entreat him live
To be executed again. Who must despatch me? . . .

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[1] *'Tis pity she's a Whore*, v. 6.

[2] Webster's Works, ed. Dyce, 1857, *Duchess of Malfi*, i. 1.

[3] The characters of Bosola, Flaminio.

[4] See Stendhal *Chronicles of Italy*, *The Cenci*, *The Duchess of Palliano*, and all the biographies of the time; of the Borgias, of Bianca Capello, of Vittoria Accoramboni, etc.

[5] Ferdinand, one of the brothers, says (ii. 5):

'I would have their bodies
Burnt in a coal-pit with the ventage stopp'd,
That their curs'd smoke might not ascend to heaven;
Or dip the sheets they lie in in pitch or sulphur,
Wrap them in't, and then light them as a match;
Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis,
And give't his lecherous father to renew
The sin of his back.'

Bosola. Come, be of comfort, I will save your life.
Duchess. Indeed, I have not leisure to tend so small a business.
B. Now, by my life, I pity you.
D. Thou art a fool, then,
To waste thy pity on a thing so wretched
As cannot pity itself. I am full of daggers.'[1] . . .

Slow words, spoken in a constrained voice, as in a dream, or as if she were speaking of a third person. Her brother sends to her a company of madmen, who leap and howl and hover around her in mournful wise; a pitiful sight, calculated to unseat the reason; a kind of foretaste of hell. She says nothing, looking upon them; her heart is dead, her eyes fixed:

'*Cariola.* What think you of, madam?
Duchess. Of nothing:
When I muse thus, I sleep.
C. Like a madman, with your eyes open?
D. Dost thou think we shall know one another
In th' other world?
C. Yes, out of question.
D. O, that it were possible we might
But hold some two days' conference with the dead!
From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure,
I never shall know here. I'll tell thee a miracle;
I am not mad yet. . . .
The heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass,
The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad.
I am acquainted with sad misery
As the tann'd galley-slave is with his oar.'[2] . . .

In this state, the limbs, like those of a condemned, still quiver, but the sensibility is worn out; the miserable body only stirs mechanically; it has suffered too much. At last the gravedigger comes with executioners, a coffin, and they sing before her a funeral dirge:

'*Duchess.* Farewell, Cariola . . .
I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl
Say her prayers ere she sleep.—Now, what you please:
What death?
Bosola. Strangling; here are your executioners.
D. I forgive them:
The apoplexy, catarrh, or cough o' th' lungs
Would do as much as they do. . . . My body
Bestow upon my women, will you? . . .
Go, tell my brothers, when I am laid out,
They then may feed in quiet.'[3]

After the mistress the maid; the latter cries and struggles:

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[1] *Duchess of Malfi*, iv. 1. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 2. [3] *Ibid.*

'*Cariola.* I will not die; I must not; I am contracted
To a young gentleman.
1st Executioner. Here's your wedding-ring.
C. If you kill me now,
I am damn'd. I have not been at confession
This two years.
B. When?[1]
C. I am quick with child.'[2]

They strangle her also, and the two children of the duchess. Antonio is assassinated; the cardinal and his mistress, the duke and his confidant, are poisoned or butchered; and the solemn words of the dying, in the midst of this butchery, utter, as from funereal trumpets, a general curse upon existence:

'We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves,
That, ruin'd, yield no echo. Fare you well. . . .
O, this gloomy world!
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!'[3] . . .

'In all our quest of greatness,
Like wanton boys, whose pastime is their care,
We follow after bubbles blown in the air.
Pleasure of life, what is't? only the good hours
Of an ague; merely a preparative to rest,
To endure vexation. . . .
Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,
Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust.'[4]

You will find nothing sadder or greater from the *Edda* to Lord Byron.

We can well imagine what powerful characters are necessary to sustain these terrible dramas. All these personages are ready for extreme acts; their resolves break forth like blows of a sword; we follow, meet at every change of scene their glowing eyes, wan lips, the starting of their muscles, the tension of their whole frame. The unrestraint of their wills contracts their violent hands, and their accumulated passion breaks out in thunder, which tears and ravages all around them, and in their own hearts. We know them, the heroes of this tragic population, Iago, Richard III., Lady Macbeth, Othello, Coriolanus, Hotspur, full of genius, courage, desire, generally enraged and criminal, always self-driven to the tomb. There are as many around Shakspeare as in his own works. Let me exhibit one more, again in the same man, Webster. No one, except Shakspeare, has seen further forward into the depths of diabolical and unchained nature. The 'White Devil' is the name which he gives to his heroine. His Vittoria Corombona receives as her lover the Duke of Brachiano, and at the first interview dreams of the issue:

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[1] 'When,' an exclamation of impatience, equivalent to 'make haste,' very common among the old English dramatists.—TR.

[2] *Duchess of Malfi*, iv. 2. [3] *Ibid.* v. 5. [4] *Ibid.* v. 4 and 5.

'To pass away the time, I'll tell your grace
A dream I had last night.'

It is certainly well related, and still better chosen, of deep meaning and very clear import. Her brother Flaminio says, aside:

'Excellent devil! she hath taught him in a dream
To make away his duchess and her husband.'[1]

In short, her husband, Camillo, is strangled, the duchess poisoned, and Vittoria, accused of the two crimes, is brought before the tribunal. Step by step, like a soldier brought to bay with his back against a wall, she defends herself, refuting and defying advocates and judges, incapable of blenching or quailing, clear in mind, ready in word, amid insults and proofs, even menaced with death on the scaffold. The advocate begins to speak in Latin.

'*Vittoria.* Pray, my lord, let him speak his usual tongue;
I'll make no answer else.
Francisco de Medicis. Why, you understand Latin.
V. I do, sir; but amongst this auditory
Which come to hear my cause, the half or more
May be ignorant in't.'

She wants a duel, bare-breasted, in open day, and challenges the advocate:

'I am at the mark, sir: I'll give aim to you,
And tell you how near you shoot.'

She mocks his speech, insults him, with biting irony:

'Surely, my lords, this lawyer here hath swallow'd
Some pothecaries' bills, or proclamations;
And now the hard and undigestible words
Come up, like stones we use give hawks for physic:
Why, this is Welsh to Latin.'

Then, to the strongest adjuration of the judges:

'To the point.
Find me guilty, sever head from body,
We'll part good friends: I scorn to hold my life
At yours, or any man's entreaty, sir. . . .
These are but feigned shadows of my evils:
Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils;
I am past such needless palsy. For your names
Of whore and murderess, they proceed from you,
As if a man should spit against the wind;
The filth returns in's face.'

Argument for argument: she has a parry for every blow: a parry and a thrust:

'But take you your course: it seems you have beggar'd me first,
And now would fain undo me. I have houses,
Jewels, and a poor remnant of crusadoes:
Would those would make you charitable!'

[1] *Vittoria Corombona*, i. 2.

Then, in a harsher voice:

'In faith, my lord, you might go pistol flies;
The sport would be more noble.'

They condemn her to be shut up in a house of convertites:

'*V.* A house of convertites! What's that?
Monticelso. A house of penitent whores.
V. Do the noblemen in Rome
Erect it for their wives, that I am sent
To lodge there?'

The sarcasm comes home like a sword-thrust; then another behind it; then cries and curses. She will not bend, she will not weep. She goes off erect, bitter and more haughty than ever:

'I will not weep;
No, I do scorn to call up one poor tear
To fawn on your injustice: bear me hence
Unto this house of —. what's your mitigating title?
Mont. Of convertites.
V. It shall not be a house of convertites;
My mind shall make it honester to me
Than the Pope's palace, and more peaceable
Than thy soul, though thou art a cardinal.'[1]

Against her furious lover, who accuses her of unfaithfulness, she is as strong as against her judges; she copes with him, casts in his teeth the death of his duchess, forces him to beg pardon, to marry her; she will play the comedy to the end, at the pistol's mouth, with the shamelessness and courage of a courtesan and an empress;[2] snared at last, she will be just as brave and more insulting at the dagger's point:

'Yes, I shall welcome death
As princes do some great ambassadors;
I'll meet thy weapon half way. . . . 'Twas a manly blow;
The next thou giv'st, murder some sucking infant;
And then thou wilt be famous.'[3]

When a woman unsexes herself, her actions transcend man's, and there is nothing which she will not suffer or dare.

VII.

Opposed to this band of tragic figures, with their contorted features, brazen fronts, combative attitudes, is a troop of sweet and timid figures, tender before everything, the most graceful and loveworthy, whom it has been given to man to depict. In Shakspeare you will meet them in Miranda, Juliet, Desdemona, Virginia, Ophelia, Cordelia, Imogen;

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[1] *Vittoria Corombona*, iii. 2.
[2] Compare Mme. Marneffe in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*.
[3] *Vittoria Corombona*, v. last scene.

but they abound also in the others; and it is a characteristic of the race to have furnished them, as it is of the drama to have represented them. By a singular coincidence, the women are more of women, the men more of men, here than elsewhere. The two natures go each to its extreme: in the one to boldness, the spirit of enterprise and resistance, the warlike, imperious, and unpolished character; in the other to sweetness, devotion, patience, inextinguishable affection,[1]—a thing unknown in distant lands, and in France especially: a woman here gives herself without drawing back, and places her glory and duty in obedience, forgiveness, adoration, wishing and pretending only to be melted and absorbed daily deeper and deeper in him whom she has freely and for ever chosen.[2] It is this, an old German instinct, which these great painters of instinct diffuse here, one and all: Penthea, Dorothea, in Ford and Greene; Isabella and the Duchess of Malfi, in Webster; Bianca, Ordella, Arethusa, Juliana, Euphrasia, Amoret, and others, in Beaumont and Fletcher: there are a score of them who, under the severest tests and the strongest temptations, display this admirable power of self-abandonment and devotion.[3] The soul, in this race, is at once primitive and serious. Women keep their candour longer than elsewhere. They lose respect less quickly; weigh worth and characters less suddenly: they are less apt to think evil, and to take the measure of their husbands. To this day, a great lady, accustomed to company, can blush in the presence of an unknown man, and feel troubled like a little girl: the blue eyes are dropt, and a child-like shame flies to her rosy cheeks. English women have not the smartness, the boldness of ideas, the assurance of bearing, the precocity, which with the French make of a young girl, in six months, a woman of intrigue and the queen of a drawing-room.[4] A narrowed life and obedience are more easy to them. More pliant and more sedentary, they are at the same time more concentrated and introspective, more disposed to follow the noble dream called duty, which is hardly generated in mankind but by silence of the senses. They are not tempted by the voluptuous sweetness which in southern countries is breathed out in the climate, in the sky, in the general spectacle of things; which dissolves every obstacle, which makes priva-

[1] Hence the happiness and strength of the marriage tie. In France it is but an association of two comrades, tolerably alike and tolerably equal, which gives rise to endless disturbance and bickering.

[2] See the representation of this character throughout English and German literature. Stendhal, an acute observer, saturated with Italian and French morals and ideas, is astonished at this phenomenon. He understands nothing of this kind of devotion, 'this slavery which English husbands have had the wit to impose on their wives under the name of duty.' These are 'the manners of a seraglio.' See also *Corinne*, by Madame de Staël.

[3] A perfect woman already: meek and patient.—HEYWOOD.

[4] See, by way of contrast, all Molière's women, so French; even Agnes and little Louison.

tion a snare and virtue a theory. They can rest content with dull sensations, dispense with excitement, endure weariness; and in this monotony of a regulated existence, fall back upon themselves, obey a pure idea, employ all the force of their hearts in maintaining their moral dignity. Thus supported by innocence and conscience, they introduce into love a profound and upright sentiment, abjure coquetry, vanity, and flirtations: they do not lie, they are not affected. When they love, they are not tasting a forbidden fruit, but are binding themselves for their whole life. Thus understood, love becomes almost a holy thing; the spectator no longer wishes to be malicious or to jest; women do not think of their own happiness, but of that of the loved ones; they aim not at pleasure, but at devotion. Euphrasia, relating her history to Philaster, says:

'My father oft would speak
Your worth and virtue; and, as I did grow
More and more apprehensive, I did thirst
To see the man so prais'd; but yet all this
Was but a maiden longing, to be lost
As soon as found; till sitting in my window,
Printing my thoughts in lawn, I saw a god,
I thought (but it was you), enter our gates.
My blood flew out, and back again as fast,
As I had puff'd it forth and suck'd it in
Like breath: Then was I call'd away in haste
To entertain you. Never was a man,
Heav'd from a sheep-cote to a sceptre, raised
So high in thoughts as I: You left a kiss
Upon these lips then, which I mean to keep
From you for ever. I did hear you talk,
'Far above singing! After you were gone,
I grew acquainted with my heart, and search'd
What stirr'd it so: Alas! I found it love;
Yet far from lust; for could I but have liv'd
In presence of you, I had had my end.'[1]

She had disguised herself as a page,[2] followed him, was his servant; and what greater happiness for a woman than to serve on her knees the man she loves? She let him scold her, threaten her with death, wound her.

'Blest be that hand!
It meant me well. Again, for pity's sake!'[3]

Do what he will, nothing but words of tenderness and adoration can leave this heart, these wan lips. More, she takes upon herself a crime of which he is accused, contradicts his assertions, is ready to die in his place. Still more, she is of use to him with the Princess Arethusa,

[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, Works, ed. G. Colman, 8 vols., 1811, *Philaster*, v. 5.
[2] Like Kaled in Byron's *Lara*.
[3] *Philaster*, iv. 4.

whom he loves; she justifies her rival, brings about their marriage, and asks no other thanks but that she may serve them both. And strange to say, the princess is not jealous.

'*Euphrasia.* Never, Sir, will I
Marry; it is a thing within my vow:
But if I may have leave to serve the princess,
To see the virtues of her lord and her,
I shall have hope to live.
Arethusa. . . . Come, live with me;
Live free as I do. She that loves my lord,
Curst be the wife that hates her!'[1]

What notion of love have they in this country? Whence happens it that all selfishness, all vanity, all rancour, every little feeling, either personal or base, flees at its approach? How comes it that the soul is given up wholly, without hesitation, without reserve, and only dreams thenceforth of prostrating and annihilating itself, as in the presence of a God? Biancha, thinking Cesario ruined, offers herself to him as his wife; and learning that he is not so, gives him up straightway, without a murmur:

'*Biancha.* So dearly I respected both your fame
And quality, that I would first have perish'd
In my sick thoughts, than e'er have given consent
To have undone your fortunes, by inviting
A marriage with so mean a one as I am:
I should have died sure, and no creature known
The sickness that had kill'd me. . . . Now since I know
There is no difference 'twixt your birth and mine,
Not much 'twixt our estates (if any be,
The advantage is on my side), I come willingly
To tender you the first-fruits of my heart,
And am content t' accept you for my husband,
Now when you are at lowest . . .
Cesario. Why, Biancha,
Report has cozen'd thee; I am not fallen
From my expected honours or possessions,
Tho' from the hope of birth-right.
B. Are you not?
Then I am lost again! I have a suit too;
You'll grant it, if you be a good man. . . .
Pray do not talk of aught what I have said t'ye. . . .
. . . Pity me;
But never love me more. . . . I'll pray for you,
That you may have a virtuous wife, a fair one;
And when I'm dead . . . *C.* Fy, fy! *B.* Think on me sometimes
With mercy for this trespass! *C.* Let us kiss
At parting, as at coming. *B.* This I have

[1] *Philaster*, v. 5.

As a free dower to a virgin's grave,
All goodness dwell with you!'[1]

The Duchess of Brachiano is betrayed, insulted by her faithless husband; to shield him from the vengeance of her family, she takes upon herself the blame of the rupture, purposely plays the shrew, and leaving him at peace with his courtesan, dies embracing his picture. Arethusa allows herself to be wounded by Philaster, stays the people who would hold back the murderer's arm, declares that he has done nothing, that it is not he, prays for him, loves him in spite of all, even to the end, as though all his acts were sacred, as if he had power of life and death over her. Ordella devotes herself, that the king, her husband, may have children;[2] she offers herself for a sacrifice, simply, without grand words, with her whole heart:

'*Ordella.* Let it be what it may then, what it dare,
I have a mind will hazard it.
Thierry. But hark you;
What may that woman merit, makes this blessing?
O. Only her duty, sir. *T.* 'Tis terrible!
O. 'Tis so much the more noble.
T. 'Tis full of fearful shadows! *O.* So is sleep, sir,
Or anything that's merely ours, and mortal;
We were begotten gods else: but those fears,
Feeling but once the fires of nobler thoughts,
Fly, like the shapes of the clouds we form, to nothing.
T. Suppose it death! *O.* I do. *T.* And endless parting
With all we can call ours, with all our sweetness,
With youth, strength, pleasure, people, time, nay reason!
For in the silent grave, no conversation,
No joyful tread of friends, no voice of lovers,
No careful father's counsel, nothing's heard,
Nor nothing is, but all oblivion,
Dust and an endless darkness: and dare you, woman,
Desire this place? *O.* 'Tis of all sleeps the sweetest:
Children begin it to us, strong men seek it,
And kings from height of all their painted glories
Fall, like spent exhalations, to this centre. . . .
T. Then you can suffer? *O.* As willingly as say it.
T. Martell, a wonder!
Here's a woman that dares die.—Yet tell me,
Are you a wife? *O.* I am, sir. *T.* And have children?—
She sighs, and weeps! *O.* Oh, none, sir. *T.* Dare you venture,
For a poor barren praise you ne'er shall hear,
To part with these sweet hopes? *O.* With all but Heaven.'[3]

Is not this grand? Can you understand how one human being can

[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, iv.

[2] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Philaster*. See also the part of Lucina in *Valentinian*.

[3] *Thierry and Theodoret*, iv. 1.

thus be separated from herself, forget and lose herself in another? They do so lose themselves, as in an abyss. When they love in vain and without hope, neither reason nor life resist; they languish, grow mad, die like Ophelia. Aspasia, forlorn,

> 'Walks discontented, with her watry eyes
> Bent on the earth. The unfrequented woods
> Are her delight; and when she sees a bank
> Stuck full of flowers, she with a sigh will tell
> Her servants what a pretty place it were
> To bury lovers in; and make her maids
> Pluck 'em, and strew her over like a corse.
> She carries with her an infectious grief
> That strikes all her beholders; she will sing
> The mournful'st things that ever ear hath heard,
> And sigh and sing again; and when the rest
> Of our young ladies, in their wanton blood,
> Tell mirthful tales in course, that fill the room
> With laughter, she will with so sad a look
> Bring forth a story of the silent death
> Of some forsaken virgin, which her grief
> Will put in such a phrase, that, ere she end,
> She'll send them weeping one by one away.'[1]

Like a spectre about a tomb, she wanders for ever about the remains of her slain lover, languishes, grows pale, swoons, ends by causing herself to be killed. Sadder still are those who, from duty or submission, allow themselves to be led to other nuptials. They are not resigned, do not recover, like Pauline in *Polyeucte*. They are shattered. Penthea, in the *Broken Heart*, is as upright, but not so strong, as Pauline; she is the English wife, not the Roman, stoical and calm[2]... She despairs, sweetly, silently, and pines to death. In her innermost heart she holds herself married to him to whom she has pledged her soul: it is the marriage of the heart which in her eyes is alone genuine; the other is only disguised adultery. In marrying Bassanes she has sinned against Orgilus; moral infidelity is worse than legal infidelity, and thenceforth she is fallen in her own eyes. She says to her brother:

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[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*, i. 1.

[2] Pauline says, in Corneille's *Polyeucte* (iii. 2):

> 'Avant qu'abandonner mon âme à mes douleurs,
> Il me faut essayer la force de mes pleurs;
> En qualité de femme ou de fille, j'espère
> Qu'ils vaincront un époux, ou fléchiront un père.
> Que si sur l'un et l'autre ils manquent de pouvoir,
> Je ne prendrai conseil que de mon désespoir.
> Apprends-moi cependant ce qu'ils ont fait au temple.'

We could not find a more reasonable and reasoning woman. So with Eliante, Henriette, in Molière.

'Pray, kill me. . . .
Kill, me, pray; nay, will you?
Ithocles. How does thy lord esteem thee? *P.* Such an one
As only you have made me; a faith-breaker,
A spotted whore; forgive me, I am one—
In act, not in desires, the gods must witness. . . .
For she that's wife to Orgilus, and lives
In known adultery with Bassanes,
Is, at the best, a whore. Wilt kill me now? . . .
The handmaid to the wages
Of country toil, drinks the untroubled streams
With leaping kids, and with the bleating lambs,
And so allays her thirst secure; whilst I
Quench my hot sighs with fleetings of my tears.'[1]

With tragic greatness, from the height of her incurable grief, she throws her gaze on life:

'My glass of life, sweet princess, hath few minutes
Remaining to run down; the sands are spent;
For by an inward messenger I feel
The summons of departure short and certain. . . . Glories
Of human greatness are but pleasing dreams,
And shadows soon decaying; on the stage
Of my mortality, my youth hath acted
Some scenes of vanity, drawn out at length
By varied pleasures, sweeten'd in the mixture,
But tragical in issue. . . . That remedy
Must be a winding-sheet, a fold of lead,
And some untrod-on corner in the earth.'[2]

There is no revolt, no bitterness; she affectionately assists her brother who has caused her unhappiness; she tries to enable him to win the woman he loves; feminine kindness and sweetness overflow in her in the depths of her despair. Love here is not despotic, passionate, as in southern climes. It is only deep and sad; the source of life is dried up, that is all; she lives no longer, because she cannot; all goes by degrees—health, reason, soul; in the end she becomes mad, and behold her dishevelled, with wide staring eyes, with broken words. For ten days she has not slept, and will not eat again; and the same fatal thought continually afflicts her heart, amidst vague dreams of maternal tenderness and happiness brought to nought, which come and go in her mind like phantoms:

'Sure, if we were all sirens, we should sing pitifully,
And 'twere a comely music, when in parts
One sung another's knell; the turtle sighs
When he hath lost his mate; and yet some say
He must be dead first: 'tis a fine deceit
To pass away in a dream! indeed, I've slept

[1] Ford's *Broken Heart*, iii. 2. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 5.

With mine eyes open, a great while. No falsehood
Equals a broken faith; there's not a hair
Sticks on my head, but, like a leaden plummet,
It sinks me to the grave: I must creep thither;
The journey is not long. . . .
Since I was first a wife, I might have been
Mother to many pretty prattling babes;
They would have smiled when I smiled; and, for certain,
I should have cried when they cried:—truly, brother,
My father would have pick'd me out a husband,
And then my little ones had been no bastards;
But 'tis too late for me to marry now,
I am past child-bearing; 'tis not my fault. . . .
Spare your hand;
Believe me, I'll not hurt it. . . .
Complain not though I wring it hard: I'll kiss it;
Oh, 'tis a fine soft palm!—hark, in thine ear;
Like whom do I look, prithee?—nay, no whispering.
Goodness! we had been happy; too much happiness
Will make folk proud, they say. . . .
There is no peace left for a ravish'd wife,
Widow'd by lawless marriage; to all memory
Penthea's, poor Penthea's name is strumpeted. . . .
Forgive me; Oh! I faint.'[1]

She dies, imploring that some gentle voice may sing her a plaintive air, a farewell ditty, a sweet funeral song. I know nothing in the drama more pure and touching.

When we find a constitution of soul so new, and capable of such great effects, it behoves us to look at the bodies. Man's extreme actions come not from his will, but his nature.[2] In order to understand the great tensions of the whole machine, we must look upon the whole machine,—I mean man's temperament, the manner in which his blood flows, his nerves quiver, his muscles are interwoven: the moral interprets the physical, and human qualities have their root in the animal species. Consider then the species in this case—the race, that is; for the sisters of Shakspeare's Ophelia and Virginia, Goethe's Clara and Margaret, Otway's Belvidera, Richardson's Pamela, constitute a race by themselves, soft and fair, with blue eyes, lily whiteness, blushing, of timid delicacy, serious sweetness, framed to yield, bend, cling. Their poets feel it clearly when they bring them on the stage; they surround them with the poetry which becomes them, the murmur of streams, the pendent willow-tresses, the frail and humid flowers of the country, so like themselves:

[1] Ford's *Broken Heart*, iv. 2.

[2] Schopenhauer, *Metaphysics of Love and Death*. Swift also said that, death and love are the two things in which man is fundamentally irrational. In fact, it is the species and the instinct which are displayed in them, not the will and the individual.

'The flower, that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azure harebell, like thy veins; no, nor
The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,
Out-sweeten'd not thy breath.'[1]

They make them sweet, like the south wind, which with its gentle breath causes the violets to bend their heads, abashed at the slightest reproach, already half bowed down by a tender and dreamy melancholy.[2] Philaster, speaking of Euphrasia, whom he takes for a page, and who has disguised herself in order to be near him, says:

'Hunting the buck,
I found him sitting, by a fountain-side,
Of which he borrow'd some to quench his thirst,
And paid the nymph again as much in tears.
A garland lay him by, made by himself,
Of many several flowers, bred in the bay,
Stuck in that mystic order, that the rareness
Delighted me: But ever when he turn'd
His tender eyes upon 'em, he would weep,
As if he meant to make 'em grow again.
Seeing such pretty helpless innocence
Dwell in his face, I ask'd him all his story.
He told me, that his parents gentle dy'd,
Leaving him to the mercy of the fields,
Which gave him roots; and of the crystal springs,
Which did not stop their courses; and the sun
Which still, he thank'd him, yielded him his light.
Then he took up his garland, and did shew
What every flower, as country people hold,
Did signify; and how all, order'd thus,
Express'd his grief; And, to my thoughts, did read
The prettiest lecture of his country art
That could be wish'd. . . . I gladly entertained him,
Who was as glad to follow; and have got
The trustiest, loving'st, and the gentlest boy
That ever master kept.'[3]

The idyl is self-produced among these human flowers; the drama delays before the angelic sweetness of their tenderness and modesty. Sometimes even the idyl is born complete and pure, and the whole theatre is occupied by a sentimental and poetical kind of opera. There are two or three such in Shakspeare; in rude Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd;* in Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess.* Ridiculous titles nowadays, for they remind us of the interminable platitudes of d'Urfé, or the affected conceits of Florian; charming titles, if we note the sincere and overflowing poetry which they contain. Amoret, the faithful shepherdess, lives in an imaginary country, full of old gods,

[1] *Cymbeline*, iv. 2.
[2] The death of Ophelia, the obsequies of Imogen.
[3] *Philaster*, i. 1.

yet English, like the dewy verdant landscapes in which Rubens sets his nymphs dancing:

'Thro' yon same bending plain
That flings his arms down to the main,
And thro' these thick woods have I run,
Whose bottom never kiss'd the sun
Since the lusty spring began.' . . .

'For to that holy wood is consecrate
A virtuous well, about whose flow'ry banks
The nimble-footed fairies dance their rounds,
By the pale moon-shine, dipping oftentimes
Their stolen children, so to make them free
From dying flesh and dull mortality.' . . .[1]

'See the dew-drops, how they kiss
Ev'ry little flower that is;
Hanging on their velvet heads,
Like a rope of christal beads.
See the heavy clouds low falling,
And bright Hesperus down calling
The dead Night from underground.'[2]

These are the plants and the aspects of the ever fresh English country, now enveloped in a pale diaphanous mist, now glistening under the absorbing sun, teeming with plants so full of sap, so delicate, that in the midst of their most brilliant splendour and their most luxuriant life, we feel that to-morrow will wither them. There, on a summer-night, the young men and girls, after their custom,[3] go to gather flowers and plight their troth. Amoret and Perigot are together; Amoret,

'Fairer far
Than the chaste blushing morn, or that fair star
That guides the wand'ring seaman thro' the deep,'

modest like a virgin, and tender as a wife, says to Perigot:

'I do believe thee: 'Tis as hard for me
To think thee false, and harder, than for thee
To hold me foul.'[4]

Strongly as she is tried, her heart, once given, never draws back. Perigot, deceived, driven to despair, persuaded that she is unchaste, strikes her with his sword, and casts her bleeding to the ground. The sullen Shepherd throws her into a well; but the god lets fall 'a drop from his watery locks' into the wound: the chaste flesh closes at the touch of the divine water, and the maiden, recovering, goes once more in search of him she loves:

'Speak if thou be here,
My Perigot! Thy Amoret, thy dear,

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[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, i. 1.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. 1.
[3] See the description in Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*.
[4] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, i. 1.

Calls on thy loved name. . . . 'Tis thy friend,
Thy Amoret; come hither to give end
To these consumings. Look up, gentle boy;
I have forgot those pains and dear annoy
I suffer'd for thy sake, and am content
To be thy love again. Why hast thou rent
Those curled locks, where I have often hung
Ribbons, and damask roses, and have flung
Waters distill'd to make thee fresh and gay,
Sweeter than nosegays on a bridal day?
Why dost thou cross thine arms, and hang thy face
Down to thy bosom, letting fall apace,
From those two little Heav'ns, upon the ground,
Show'rs of more price, more orient, and more round,
Than those that hang upon the moon's pale brow?
Cease these complainings, shepherd! I am now
The same I ever was, as kind and free,
And can forgive before you ask of me:
Indeed, I can and will.'[1]

Who could resist her sweet and sad smile? Still deceived, Perigot wounds her again; she falls, but without anger.

'So this work hath end!
Farewell, and live! be constant to thy friend
That loves thee next.'[2]

A nymph cures her, and at last Perigot, disabused, comes and throws himself on his knees before her. She stretches out her arms; in spite of all that he had done, she was not changed:

'I am thy love!
Thy Amoret, for evermore thy love!
Strike once more on my naked breast, I'll prove
As constant still. Oh, cou'dst thou love me yet,
How soon could I my former griefs forget!'[3]

Such are the touching and poetical figures which these poets introduce in their dramas, or in connection with their dramas, amidst murders, assassinations, the clash of swords, the howl of slaughter, in contrast with the furious men who adore or woo them, like them carried to excess, transported by their tenderness as the others by their violence: it is the complete exposition, the perfect opposition of the feminine instinct led to self-abandoning recklessness, and the masculine harshness led to murderous rage. Thus built up and thus provided, the drama of the age was enabled to exhibit the inner depths of man, and to set in motion the most powerful human emotions; to bring upon the stage Hamlet and Lear, Ophelia and Cordelia, the death of Desdemona and the butcheries of Macbeth.

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[1] *The Faithful Shepherdess*, iv. [2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.* v. Compare, as an illustration of the contrast of races, the Italian pastorals, Tasso's *Aminta*, Guarini's *Il Pastor fido*, etc.

CHAPTER III.

Ben Jonson.

I. The masters of the school, in the school and in their age—Jonson—His mood—Character—Education—First efforts—Struggles—Poverty—Sickness—Death.

II. His learning—Classical tastes—Didactic characters—Good management of his plots—Freedom and precision of his style—Vigour of his will and passion.

III. His dramas—*Catiline* and *Sejanus*—How he was able to depict the personages and the passions of the Roman decadence.

IV. His comedies—His reformation and theory of the theatre—His satirical comedies—*Volpone*—Why these comedies are serious and warlike—How they depict the passions of the Renaissance—His farces—*The Silent Woman*—Why these comedies are energetic and rude—How they conform with the tastes of the Renaissance.

V. Limits of his talent—Wherein he remains beneath Molière—Want of higher philosophy and comic gaiety—His imagination and fancy—*The Staple of News* and *Cynthia's Revels*—How he treats the comedy of society, and lyrical comedy—His smaller poems—His masques—Theatrical and picturesque manners of the court—*The Sad Shepherd*—How Jonson remains a poet to his death.

VI. General idea of Shakspeare—The fundamental idea in Shakspeare—Conditions of human reason—Shakspeare's master faculty—Conditions of exact representation.

I.

WHEN a new civilisation brings a new art to light, there are about a dozen men of talent who express the general idea, surrounding one or two men of genius who express it thoroughly. Guilhem de Castro, Pérès de Montalvan, Tirso de Molina, Ruiz de Alarcon, Augustin Moreto, surrounding Calderon and Lope de Vega; Crayer, Van Oost, Romboust, Van Thulden, Van Dyk, Honthorst, surrounding Rubens; Ford, Marlowe, Massinger, Webster, Beaumont, Fletcher, surrounding Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. The first constitute the chorus, the others are the leaders. They sing the same piece together, and at times the chorus is equal to the solo; but only at times. Thus, in the dramas which I have just referred to, the poet occasionally reaches the summit of his art, hits upon a complete character, a burst of sublime passion; then he falls back, gropes amid qualified successes, rough sketches, feeble imitations, and at last takes refuge in the tricks of his

trade. It is not in him, but in great men like Ben Jonson and Shakspeare, that we must look for the attainment of his idea and the fulness of his art. 'Numerous were the wit-combats,' says Fuller, 'betwixt him (Shakspeare) and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakspeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.'[1] Such was Jonson physically and morally, and his portraits do but confirm this just and lively sketch: a vigorous, heavy, and uncouth person; a wide and long face, early marred by scurvy, a square jaw, enormous cheeks; his animal organs as much developed as those of his intellect: the sour aspect of a man in a passion or on the verge of a passion; to which add the body of an athlete, about forty years of age, 'mountain belly, ungracious gait.' Such was the outside, and the inside is like it. He was a genuine Englishman, big and coarsely framed, energetic, combative, proud, often morose, and prone to strange splenetic imaginations. He related to Drummond that for a whole night he imagined 'that he saw the Carthaginians and the Romans fighting on his great toe.'[2] Not that he is melancholic by nature; on the contrary, he loves to escape from himself by a wide and blustering licence of merriment, by copious and varied converse, assisted by good Canary wine, with which he drenches himself, and which ends by becoming a necessity to him. These great phlegmatic butchers' frames require a generous liquor to give them a tone, and to supply the place of the sun which they lack. Expansive moreover, hospitable, even prodigal, with a frank imprudent heartiness,[3] making him forget himself wholly before Drummond, his Scotch host, a vigorous and malicious pedant, who has marred his ideas and vilified his character. What we know of his life is in harmony with his person: he suffered much, fought much, dared much. He was studying at Cambridge, when his father-in-law, a bricklayer, recalled him, and set him to the trowel. He ran away, enlisted as a volunteer into the army of the Low Countries, killed and despoiled a man in single combat, 'in the view of both armies.' You see he was a man of bodily action, and that he exercised his limbs in early life.[4] On his return to England, at the age of nineteen, he went on the stage for his livelihood, and occupied himself also in touching up dramas. Having been provoked, he fought, was seriously wounded, but killed his adversary; after that, he was cast into prison, and found

[1] Fuller's *Worthies*, ed. Nuttall, 1840, 3 vols., iii. 284.

[2] There is a similar hallucination to be met with in the life of Lord Castlereagh, who afterwards cut his throat.

[3] His character lies between those of Fielding and Samuel Johnson.

[4] At the age of forty-four he went to Scotland on foot.

himself 'nigh the gallows.' A Catholic priest visited and converted him; quitting his prison penniless, at twenty years of age, he married. At last, two years later, he produced his first play. Children came, he must earn them bread; and he was not of the stuff to follow the beaten track to the end, being persuaded that a fine philosophy ought to be introduced into comedy, a special nobleness and dignity,—that it was necessary to follow the example of the ancients, to imitate their severity and their accuracy, to be above the theatrical racket and the rude improbabilities in which the common herd delighted. He openly proclaimed his intention in his prefaces, roundly railed at his rivals, proudly set forth on the stage[1] his doctrines, his morality, his character. He thus made bitter enemies, who defamed him outrageously and before their audiences, whom he exasperated by the violence of his satires, and against whom he struggled without intermission to the end. More, he constituted himself a judge of the public corruption, rudely attacked the reigning vices, 'fearing no strumpets drugs, nor ruffians stab.'[2] He treated his hearers like schoolboys, and spoke to them always like a censor and a master. If necessary, he ventured further. His companions, Marston and Chapman, had been put in prison for an irreverent phrase in one of their pieces; and the report spreading that their noses and ears were to be slit, Jonson, who had taken part in the piece, voluntarily made himself a prisoner, and obtained their pardon. On his return, amid the feasting and rejoicing, his mother showed him a violent poison which she intended to put into his drink, to save him from the sentence; and 'to show that she was not a coward,' adds Jonson, 'she had resolved to drink first.' We see that in the matter of vigorous actions he found examples in his own family. Toward the end of his life, money failed him; he was liberal, improvident; his pockets always had holes in them, as his hand was always open; though he had written a vast quantity, he was obliged to write still in order to live. Paralysis came on, his scurvy was aggravated, dropsy attacked him. He could not leave his room, nor walk without assistance. His last plays did not succeed. In the epilogue to the *New Inn* he says:

> 'If you expect more than you had to-night,
> The maker is sick and sad. . . .
> All that his faint and falt'ring tongue doth crave,
> Is, that you not impute it to his brain,
> That's yet unhurt, altho' set round with pain,
> It cannot long hold out.'

His enemies brutally insulted him:

> 'Thy Pegasus . . .
> He had bequeathed his belly unto thee,
> To hold that little learning which is fled
> Into thy guts from out thy emptye head.'

[1] Parts of *Crites and Asper.*

[2] *Every Man out of his Humour*, i.

Inigo Jones, his colleague, deprived him of the patronage of the court. He was obliged to beg a supply of money from the Lord Treasurer, then from the Earl of Newcastle:

> 'Disease, the enemy, and his engineers,
> Want, with the rest of his concealed compeers,
> Have cast a trench about me, now five years. . . .
> The muse not peeps out, one of hundred days;
> But lies blocked up and straitened, narrowed in,
> Fixed to the bed and boards, unlike to win
> Health, or scarce breath, as she had never been.'[1]

His wife and children were dead; he lived alone, forsaken, served by an old woman. Thus almost always, sadly and miserably is dragged out and ends the last act of the human comedy. After so many years, after so many sustained efforts, amid so much glory and genius, we find a poor shattered body, drivelling and suffering, between a servant and a priest.

II.

This is the life of a combatant, bravely endured, worthy of the seventeenth century by its crosses and its energy; courage and force abounded throughout. Few writers have laboured more, and more conscientiously; his knowledge was vast, and in this age of great scholars he was one of the best classics of his time, as deep as he was accurate and thorough, having studied the minutest details of ancient life. It was not enough for him to have stored himself from the best writers, to have their whole works continually in his mind, to scatter his pages, whether he would or no, with recollections of them. He dug into the orators, critics, scholiasts, grammarians, and compilers of inferior rank; he picked up stray fragments; he took characters, jokes, refinements, from Athenæus, Libanius, Philostratus. He had so well entered into and digested the Greek and Latin ideas, that they were incorporated with his own. They enter into his speech without discord; they spring forth in him as vigorous as at their first birth; he originates even when he remembers. On every subject he had this thirst for knowledge, and this gift of mastering knowledge. He knew alchemy when he wrote the *Alchemist*. He is familiar with alembics, retorts, receivers, as if he had passed his life seeking after the philosopher's stone. He explains incineration, calcination, imbibition, rectification, reverberation, as well as Agrippa and Paracelsus. If he speaks of cosmetics,[2] he brings out a shopful of them; one might make out of his plays a dictionary of the oaths and costumes of courtiers; he seems to have a specialty in all branches. A still greater proof of his force is,

[1] Ben Jonson's *Poems*, ed. Bell, *An Epistle Mendicant*, to Richard, Lord Weston, Lord High Treasurer (1631), p. 244.

[2] *The Devil is an Ass.*

the task of recording exactly all the desires of speech, all the necessities of silence, and of recording nothing else. Now he picks out a laughable incident, an affectation, a species of folly, from the manners of the dandies and the courtiers; a mode of swearing, an extravagant style, a habit of gesticulating, or any other oddity contracted by vanity or fashion. The hero whom he covers with these eccentricities, is overloaded by them. He disappears beneath his enormous trappings; he drags them about with him everywhere; he cannot get rid of them for an instant. We no longer see the man under the dress; he is like a mannikin, oppressed under a cloak, too heavy for him. Sometimes, doubtless, his habits of geometrical construction produce personages almost life-like. Bobadil, the grave boaster; Captain Tucca, the begging bully, inventive buffoon, ridiculous talker; Amorphus the traveller, a pedantic doctor of good manners, laden with eccentric phrases, create as much illusion as one can wish; but it is because they are flitting comicalities and low characters. It is not necessary for a poet to study such creatures; it is enough that he discovers in them three or four leading features; it is of little consequence if they always present themselves in the same light: they produce laughter, like the *Countess d'Escarbagnas* or any of the *Fâcheux* in Molière; we want nothing else of them. On the contrary, the others weary and repel us. They are stage-masks, not living figures. Moulded into a fixed expression, they persist to the end of the piece in their unvarying grimace or their eternal frown. A man is not an abstract passion. He stamps the vices and virtues which he possesses with his individual mark. These vices and virtues receive, on entering into him, a bent and form which they have not in others. No one is unmixed sensuality. Take a thousand sensualists, and you will find a thousand modes of sensuality; for there are a thousand paths, a thousand circumstances and degrees, in sensuality. To make Sir Epicure Mammon a real being, we must give him the kind of disposition, the species of education, the manner of imagination, which produce sensuality. When we wish to construct a man, we must dig down to the foundations of mankind; that is, we must define to ourselves the structure of his bodily machine, and the primitive gait of his mind. Jonson has not dug sufficiently deep, and his constructions are incomplete; he has built on the surface, and he has built but a single story. He was not acquainted with man in his fulness, and he ignored man's basis; he put on the stage and gave a representation of moral treatises, fragments of history, scraps of satire; he did not stamp new beings on the imagination of mankind.

He possesses all the other gifts, and in particular the classical; first of all, the talent for composition. For the first time we see a concocted plot, a complete intrigue, with its beginning, middle, and end; subordinate actions well arranged, well combined; an interest which grows and never flags; a leading truth which all the events combine to demonstrate; a ruling idea which all the characters combine to illustrate;

in short, an art like that which Molière and Racine were about to apply and teach. He does not, like Shakspeare, take a novel from Greene, a chronicle from Holinshed, a life from Plutarch, promiscuously, to cut them into scenes, irrespective of likelihood, indifferent as to order and unity, caring only to set up men, at times wandering into poetic reveries, at need finishing up the piece abruptly with a recognition or a butchery. He governs himself and his characters; he wills and he knows all that they do, and all that he does. But beyond his habits of Latin regularity, he possesses the great faculty of his age and race,—the sentiment of nature and existence, the exact knowledge of precise detail, the power in frankly and boldly handling frank passions. This gift is not wanting in any writer of the time; they do not fear words that are true, shocking, and striking details of the bedchamber or medical study; the prudery of modern England and the refinement of monarchical France veil not the nudity of their figures, or dim the colouring of their pictures. They live freely, liberally, amidst living things; they see the ins and outs of lust, raging without shame, hypocrisy, or redeeming softness; and they exhibit it as they see it, Jonson as boldly as the rest, occasionally more boldly than the rest, strengthened as he is by the vigour and roughness of his athletic temperament, by the extraordinary exactness and abundance of his observations and his knowledge. Add yet his moral loftiness, his sourness, his powerful railing wrath, exasperated and bitter against vice, his resolution strengthened by pride and by conscience:

> 'With an armed and resolved hand,
> I'll strip the ragged follies of the time
> Naked as at their birth . . . and with a whip of steel,
> Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs.
> I fear no mood stampt in a private brow,
> When I am pleas'd t' unmask a public vice.
> I fear no strumpets drugs, nor ruffians stab,
> Should I detect their hateful luxuries;'[1]

above all, a scorn of base compliance, a disdain for

> 'Those jaded wits
> That run a broken pace for common hire,'—[2]

an enthusiasm, or deep love of

> 'A happy muse,
> Born on the wings of her immortal thought,
> That kicks at earth with a disdainful heel,
> And beats at heaven gates with her bright hoofs.'[3]

Such are the energies which he brought to the drama and to comedy; they were great enough to ensure him a high position, and a position apart.

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[1] *Every Man out of his Humour*, Prologue. [2] *Poetaster*, i. 2. [3] *Ibid.*

III.

For whatever Jonson undertakes, whatever be his faults, haughtiness, rough-handling, predilection for morality and the past, antiquarian and censorious instincts, he is never little or commonplace. It signifies nothing that in his Latinised tragedies, *Sejanus*, *Catiline*, he is fettered by the worship of the old worn models of the Roman decadence; nothing that he plays the scholar, hammers out Ciceronian harangues, hauls in choruses imitated from Seneca, holds forth in the style of Lucan and the rhetoricians of the empire: he more than once attains a genuine accent; through his pedantry, heaviness, literary adoration of the ancients, nature forces its way; he lights, at his first attempt, on the crudities, horrors, gigantic lechery, shameless depravity of imperial Rome; he takes in hand and sets in motion the lusts and ferocities, the passions of courtesans and princesses, the daring of assassins and of great men, which produced Messalina, Agrippina, Catiline, Tiberius.[1] In the Rome which he places before us we go boldly and straight to the end; justice and pity oppose no barriers. Amid victorious and slavish customs, human nature is upset; corruption and crime are held as marks of insight and energy. Observe how, in *Sejanus*, assassination is plotted and carried out with marvellous coolness. Livia discusses with Sejanus the methods of poisoning her husband, in a clear style, without circumlocution, as if the subject were how to gain a lawsuit or how to serve up a dinner. There are no equivocations, no hesitation, no remorse in the Rome of Tiberius. Glory and virtue consist in power; scruples are for common souls; the mark of a lofty heart is to desire all and to dare all. Macro says rightly:

> 'Men's fortune there is virtue; reason their will:
> Their licence, law; and their observance skill.
> Occasion is their foil; conscience, their stain;
> Profit, their lustre: and what else is vain.'[2]

Sejanus addresses Livia thus:

> 'Royal lady, . . .
> Yet, now I see your wisdom, judgment, strength,
> Quickness, and will, to apprehend the means
> To your own good and greatness, I protest
> Myself through rarified, and turn'd all flame
> In your affection.'[3]

These are the loves of the wolf and his mate; he praises her for being so ready to kill. And observe in one moment the morals of a prostitute appear behind the manners of the poisoner. Sejanus goes out, and immediately, like a courtesan, Livia turns to her physician, saying:

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[1] See the second Act of *Catiline*.

[2] *The Fall of Sejanus*, iii. last Scene.

[3] *Ibid.* ii.

'How do I look to-day?
Eudemus. Excellent clear, believe it. This same fucus
Was well laid on. *L.* Methinks 'tis here not white.
E. Lend me your scarlet, lady. 'Tis the sun
Hath giv'n some little taint unto the ceruse,
You should have us'd of the white oil I gave you.
Sejanus, for your love! His very name
Commandeth above Cupid or his shafts. . . .
'Tis now well, lady, you should
Use of the dentifrice I prescrib'd you too,
To clear your teeth, and the prepar'd pomatum,
To smooth the skin. A lady cannot be
Too curious of her form, that still would hold
The heart of such a person, made her captive,
As you have this: who, to endear him more
In your clear eye, hath put away his wife . . .
Fair Apicata, and made spacious room
To your new pleasures. *L.* Have we not return'd
That with our hate to Drusus, and discovery
Of all his counsels? . . .
E. When will you take some physick, lady? *L.* When
I shall, Eudemus: but let Drusus' drug
Be first prepar'd. *E.* Were Lygdus made, that's done. . . .
I'll send you a perfume, first to resolve
And procure sweat, and then prepare a bath
To cleanse and clear the cutis; against when
I'll have an excellent new fucus made
Resistive 'gainst the sun, the rain or wind,
Which you shall lay on with a breath or oil,
As you best like, and last some fourteen hours.
This change came timely, lady, for your health.'[1]

He ends by congratulating her on her approaching change of husbands: Drusus was injuring her complexion; Sejanus is far preferable; a physiological and practical conclusion. The Roman apothecary had on the same shelf his medicine-chest, his chest of cosmetics, and his chest of poisons.[2]

After this you find one after another all the scenes of Roman life unfolded, the bargain of murder, the comedy of justice, the shamelessness of flattery, the anguish and vacillation of the senate. When Sejanus wishes to buy a conscience, he questions, jokes, plays round the offer he is about to make, throws it out as if in pleasantry, so as to be able to withdraw it, if need be; then, when the intelligent look of the rascal, whom he is trafficking with, shows that he is understood:

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[1] *The Fall of Sejanus*, ii.

[2] See *Catiline*, Act ii.; a fine scene, no less frank and lively, on the dissipation of the higher ranks in Rome.

'Protest not.
Thy looks are vows to me. . . .
Thou art a man, made to make consuls. Go.'[1]

Elsewhere, the senator Latiaris brings to him his friend Sabinus, storms before the latter against tyranny, openly expresses a desire for liberty, provoking him to speak. Then two spies who were hid behind the door, cast themselves on Sabinus, crying, 'Treason to Cæsar!' and drag him, with his face covered, before the tribunal, thence to 'be thrown upon the Gemonies.'[2] So, when the senate is assembled, Tiberius has chosen beforehand the accusers of Silius, and their parts distributed to them. They mumble in a corner, whilst aloud is heard, in the emperor's presence:

'Cæsar,
Live long and happy, great and royal Cæsar;
The gods preserve thee and thy modesty,
Thy wisdom and thy innocence. . . . Guard
His meekness, Jove, his piety, his care,
His bounty.'[3]

Then the herald cites the accused; Varro, the consul, pronounces the indictment; Afer hurls upon them his bloodthirsty eloquence: the senators get excited; we see laid bare, as in Tacitus and Juvenal, the depths of Roman servility, hypocrisy, insensibility, the venomous craft of Tiberius. At last, after so many others, the turn of Sejanus comes. The fathers anxiously assemble in the temple of Apollo; for some days past Tiberius has seemed to be trying to contradict himself; he has removed the friend of his favourite, and next day sets his enemies in high positions. They mark the face of Sejanus, and know not what to anticipate; Sejanus is troubled, then after a moment's cringing is more arrogant than ever. The plots are confused, the rumours contradictory. Macro alone is in the confidence of Tiberius, and soldiers are seen, drawn up at the porch of the temple, ready to enter at the earliest sound. The formula of convocation is read, and the council marks the names of those who do not respond to the summons; then Regulus addresses them, and announces that Cæsar

'Propounds to this grave senate, the bestowing
Upon the man he loves, honour'd Sejanus,
The tribunitial dignity and power:
Here are his letters, signed with his signet.
What pleaseth now the Fathers to be done!'
'*Senators.* Read, read 'em, open, publicly read 'em.
Cotta. Cæsar hath honour'd his own greatness much
In thinking of this act. *Trio.* It was a thought
Happy, and worthy Cæsar. *Latiaris.* And the lord
As worthy it, on whom it is directed!

[1] *The Fall of Sejanus*, i. [2] *Ibid.* iv. [3] *Ibid.* iii.

Haterius. Most worthy! *Sanquinius.* Rome did never boast the virtue
That could give envy bounds, but his: Sejanus.—
1*st Sen.* Honour'd and noble! 2*d Sen.* Good and great Sejanus!
Præcones. Silence!'[1]

Tiberius' letter is read. First, long obscure and vague phrases, mingled with indirect protests and accusations, foreboding something and revealing nothing. Suddenly comes an insinuation against Sejanus. The fathers are alarmed, but the next line reassures them. A word or two further on, the same insinuation is repeated with greater exactness. 'Some there be that would interpret this his public severity to be particular ambition; and that, under a pretext of service to us, he doth but remove his own lets: alledging the strengths he hath made to himself, by the prætorian soldiers, by his faction in court and senate, by the offices he holds himself, and confers on others, his popularity and dependents, his urging (and almost driving) us to this our unwilling retirement, and lastly, his aspiring to be our son-in-law.' The fathers rise: 'This 's strange!' Their eager eyes are fixed on the letter, on Sejanus, who perspires and grows pale; their thoughts are busy with conjectures, and the words of the letter fall one by one, amidst a sepulchral silence, caught as they fall with a devouring eagerness of attention. The senators anxiously weigh the value of these varying expressions, fearing to compromise themselves with the favourite or with the prince, all feeling that they must understand, if they value their lives.

'"Your wisdoms, Conscript Fathers, are able to examine, and censure these suggestions. But, were they left to our absolving voice, we durst pronounce them, as we think them, most malicious."
Senator. O, he has restor'd all; list.
Præco. "Yet are they offer'd to be averr'd, and on the lives of the informers."'[2]

At this word the letter becomes menacing. Those next Sejanus forsake him. 'Sit farther. . . . Let's remove!' The heavy Sanquinius leaps panting over the benches. The soldiers come in; then Macro. And now, at last, the letter orders the arrest of Sejanus.

'*Regulus.* Take him hence.
And all the gods guard Cæsar! *Trio.* Take him hence.
Haterius. Hence. *Cotta.* To the dungeon with him. *San.* He deserves it.
Sen. Crown all our doors with bays. *San.* And let an ox,
With gilded horns and garlands, straight be led
Unto the Capitol. *Hat.* And sacrific'd
To Jove, for Cæsar's safety. *Trio.* All our gods
Be present still to Cæsar! . . .
Cotta. Let all the traitor's titles be defac'd.
Trio. His images and statues be pull'd down. . . .

[1] *The Fall of Sejanus*, v.

[2] *Ibid.*

Sen. Liberty! liberty! liberty! Lead on,
And praise to Macro that hath saved Rome.'[1]

It is the baying of a furious pack of hounds, let loose at last on him, under whose hand they had crouched, and who had for a long time beaten and bruised them. Jonson discovered in his own energetic soul the energy of these Roman passions; and the clearness of his mind, added to his profound knowledge, unable to construct characters, furnished him with general ideas and striking incidents, which suffice to depict manners.

IV.

Moreover, it was to this that he turned his talent. Nearly all his work consists of comedies, not sentimental and fanciful as Shakspeare's, but imitative and satirical, written to represent and correct follies and vices. He introduced a new model; he had a doctrine; his masters were Terence and Plautus. He observes the unity of time and place, almost exactly. He ridicules the authors who, in the same play,

'Make a child now-swaddled, to proceed
Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed,
Past threescore years; or, with three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot and half-foot words,
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars. . . .
He rather prays you will be pleas'd to see
One such to-day, as other plays should be;
Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas,
Nor creaking throne comes down the boys to please:
Nor nimble squib is seen to make afeard
The gentlewomen. . . .
But deeds, and language, such as men do use. . . .
You, that have so grac'd monsters, may like men.'[2]

Men, as we see them in the streets, with their whims and humours—

'When some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers
In their confluxions, all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour.'[3]

It is these humours which he exposes to the light, not with the artist's curiosity, but with the moralist's hate:

'I will scourge those apes,
And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirrour,
As large as is the stage whereon we act;
Where they shall see the time's deformity
Anatomiz'd in every nerve, and sinew,
With constant courage and contempt of fear. . . .

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[1] *The Fall of Sejanus*, v. [2] *Every Man in his Humour*, Prologue.
[3] *Every Man out of his Humour*, Prologue.

My strict hand
Was made to seize on vice, and with a gripe
Squeeze out the humour of such spongy natures,
As lick up every idle vanity.'[1]

Doubtless a determination so strong and decided does violence to the dramatic spirit. Jonson's comedies are not rarely harsh; his characters are too grotesque, laboriously constructed, mere automatons; the poet thought less of making living beings than of scotching a vice; the scenes get arranged mechanically, or are confused together; we see the process, we feel the satirical intention throughout; delicate and easy-flowing imitation is absent, as well as the graceful sprightliness which abounds in Shakspeare. But if Jonson comes across harsh passions, visibly evil and vile, he will derive from his energy and wrath the talent to render them odious and visible, and will produce a *Volpone*, a sublime work, the sharpest picture of the manners of the age, in which is displayed the full brightness of the evil lusts, in which lewdness, cruelty, love of gold, shamelessness of vice, display a sinister yet splendid poetry, worthy of one of Titian's bacchanalians.[2] All this makes itself apparent in the first scene, when Volpone says:

'Good morning to the day; and next, my gold:
Open the shrine, that I may see my saint!'

This saint is his piles of gold, jewels, precious plate:

'Hail the world's soul, and mine! . . . O thou son of Sol,
But brighter than thy father, let me kiss,
With adoration, thee, and every relick
Of sacred treasure in this blessed room!'[3]

Presently after, the dwarf, the eunuch, and the hermaphrodite of the house sing a sort of pagan and fantastic interlude; they chant in strange verses the metamorphoses of the hermaphrodite, who was first the soul of Pythagoras. We are at Venice, in the palace of the magnifico Volpone. These deformed creatures, the splendour of gold, this strange and poetical buffoonery, transport the thought immediately to the sensual city, queen of vices and of arts.

The rich Volpone lives in the antique style. Childless and without relatives, playing the invalid, he makes all his flatterers hope to be his heir, receives their gifts,

'Letting the cherry knock against their lips,
And draw it by their mouths, and back again.'[4]

Glad to have their gold, but still more glad to deceive them, artistic in guile as in avarice, and just as pleased to look at a contortion of suffering as at the sparkle of a ruby.

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[1] *Every Man out of his Humour*, Prologue.

[2] Compare *Volpone* with Regnard's *Légataire*; the end of the sixteenth with the beginning of the eighteenth century.

[3] *Volpone*, i. 1.

[4] *Ibid.*

The advocate Voltore arrives, bearing a 'huge piece of plate.' Volpone casts himself on his bed, wraps himself in furs, heaps up his pillows, and coughs as if at the point of death:

> '*Volpone.* I thank you, signior Voltore,
> Where is the plate? mine eyes are bad. . . . Your love
> Hath taste in this, and shall not be unanswer'd . . .
> I cannot now last long. . . . I feel me going,—
> Uh, uh, uh, uh!'[1]

He closes his eyes, as though exhausted:

> '*Voltore.* Am I inscrib'd his heir for certain?
> *Mosca* (*Volpone's Parasite*). Are you?
> I do beseech you, sir, you will vouchsafe
> To write me i' your family. All my hopes
> Depend upon your worship. I am lost,
> Except the rising sun do shine on me.
> *Volt.* It shall both shine and warm thee, Mosca. *M.* Sir,
> I am a man, that hath not done your love
> All the worst offices: here I wear your keys,
> See all your coffers and your caskets lockt,
> Keep the poor inventory of your jewels,
> Your plate and moneys; am your steward, sir,
> Husband your goods here. *Volt.* But am I sole heir?
> *M.* Without a partner, sir, confirm'd this morning;
> The wax is warm yet, and the ink scarce dry
> Upon the parchment. *Volt.* Happy, happy, me!
> By what good chance, sweet Mosca? *M.* Your desert, sir;
> I know no second cause.'[2]

And he details the abundance of the wealth in which Voltore is about to swim, the gold which is to pour upon him, the opulence which is to flow in his house as a river:

> 'When will you have your inventory brought, sir?
> Or see a copy of the will?'

The imagination is fed with precise words, sensible details. Thus, one after another, the would-be heirs come like beasts of prey. The second is an old miser, Corbaccio, deaf, worn out, almost dying, who nevertheless hopes to survive Volpone. To make more sure of it, he would fain have Mosca give his master a narcotic. He has it about him, this excellent opiate; he has had it prepared under his own eyes, he suggests it. His joy on finding Volpone more ill than himself is bitterly humorous:

> '*C.* How does your patron? . . . *M.* His mouth
> Is ever gaping, and his eyelids hang.
> *C.* Good.
> *M.* A freezing numbness stiffens all his joints,
> And makes the colour of his flesh like lead.

[1] *Volpone*, i. 3. [2] *Ibid.*

C. 'Tis good.
M. His pulse beats slow, and dull. *C.* Good symptoms still.
M. And from his brain. *C.* I conceive you, good.
M. Flows a cold sweat, with a continual rheum,
Forth the resolved corners of his eyes.
C. Is't possible? Yet I am better, ha!
How does he, with the swimming of his head?
M. O, sir, 'tis past the scotomy; he now
Hath lost his feeling, and hath left to snort:
You hardly can perceive him, that he breathes.
C. Excellent, excellent, sure I shall outlast him:
This makes me young again, a score of years.'[1]

If you would be his heir, says Mosca, the moment is favourable; but you must not let yourself be forestalled. Voltore has been here, and presented him with this piece of plate:

'*C.* See, Mosca, look,
Here, I have brought a bag of bright cecchines,
Will quite weigh down his plate. . . .
M. Now, would I counsel you, make home with speed,
There, frame a will; whereto you shall inscribe
My master your sole heir. . . . *C.* This plot
Did I think on before. . . .
M. And you so certain to survive him. *C.* I.
M. Being so lusty a man. *C.* 'Tis true.'[2]

And the old man hobbles away, not hearing the insults and ridicule thrown at him, he is so deaf.

When he is gone the merchant Corvino arrives, bringing an orient pearl and a superb diamond:

'*Cor.* Am I his heir?
Mosca. Sir, I am sworn, I may not shew the will
Till he be dead: but here has been Corbaccio,
Here has been Voltore, here were others too,
I cannot number 'em, they were so many.
All gaping here for legacies; but I,
Taking the vantage of his naming you,
Signior Corvino, Signior Corvino, took
Paper, and pen, and ink, and there I ask'd him,
Whom he would have his heir? Corvino. Who
Should be executor? Corvino. And,
To any question he was silent to,
I still interpreted the nods, he made
(Through weakness) for consent: and sent home th' others,
Nothing bequeath'd them, but to cry and curse.
Cor. O my dear Mosca! . . . Has he children? *M.* Bastards,
Some dozen, or more, that he begot on beggars,
Gypsies and Jews, and black-moors, when he was drunk. . . .

[1] *Volpone*, i. 4. [2] *Ibid.*

Speak out:
You may be louder yet. . . .
Faith, I could stifle him rarely with a pillow,
As well as any woman that should keep him.
C. Do as you will, but I'll begone.'[1]

Corvino presently departs; for the passions of the time have all the beauty of frankness. And Volpone, casting aside his sick man's garb, cries:

'My divine Mosca!
Thou hast to-day out-gone thyself. . . . Prepare
Me musick, dances, banquets, all delights;
The Turk is not more sensual in his pleasures,
Than will Volpone.'[2]

On this invitation, Mosca draws a most voluptuous portrait of Corvino's wife, Celia. Smitten with a sudden desire, Volpone dresses himself as a mountebank, and goes singing under her windows with all the sprightliness of a quack; for he is naturally a comedian, like a true Italian, of the same family as Scaramouch, as good an actor in the public square as in his house. Having once seen Celia, he resolves to obtain her at any price:

'Mosca, take my keys,
Gold, plate, and jewels, all's at thy devotion;
Employ them how thou wilt; nay, coin me too:
So thou, in this, but crown my longings, Mosca.'[3]

Mosca tells Corvino that some quack's oil has cured his master, and that they are looking for a 'young woman, lusty and full of juice,' to complete the cure:

'Ha'e you no kinswoman?
Godso.—Think, think, think, think, think, think, think, sir.
One o' the doctors offer'd there his daughter.
C. How? *M.* Yes, signior Lupo, the physician.
C. His daughter? *M.* And a virgin, sir. . . . *C.* Wretch!
Covetous wretch!'[4]

Though unreasonably jealous, Corvino is gradually induced to offer his wife. He has given too much already, and would not lose his advantage. He is like a half-ruined gamester, who with a shaking hand throws on the green cloth the remainder of his fortune. He brings the poor sweet woman, weeping and resisting. Excited by his own hidden pain, he becomes furious:

'Be damn'd.
(Heart) I will drag thee hence, home by the hair;
Cry thee a strumpet through the streets; rip up
Thy mouth unto thine ears; and slit thy nose;
Like a raw rotchet—Do not tempt me, come,
Yield, I am loth—(Death!) I will buy some slave

[1] *Volpone*, i. 5. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* ii. 4. [4] *Ibid.* ii. 6.

Whom I will kill, and bind thee to him, alive;
And at my window hang you forth, devising
Some monstrous crime, which I, in capital letters,
Will eat into thy flesh with aquafortis,
And burning cor'sives, on this stubborn breast.
Now, by the blood thou hast incens'd, I'll do 't!
Celia. Sir, what you please, you may, I am your martyr.
Cor. Be not thus obstinate; I ha' not deserv'd it:
Think who it is intreats you. Pr'ythee, sweet,
(Good faith), thou shalt have jewels, gowns, attires,
What thou wilt think, and ask. Do but go kiss him,
Or touch him, but. For my sake. At my suit.
This once No? not? I shall remember this.
Will you disgrace me thus? Do you thirst my undoing?'[1]

Mosca turns, the moment before, to Volpone:

'Sir,
Signior Corvino . . . hearing of the consultation had
So lately, for your health, is come to offer,
Or rather, sir, to prostitute.—*C.* Thanks, sweet Mosca.'
M. Freely, unask'd, or unintreated. *C.* Well.
M. As the true fervent instance of his love,
His own most fair and proper wife; the beauty
Only of price in Venice. *C.* 'Tis well urg'd.'[2]

Where can we see such blows launched and driven hard, full in the face, by the violent hand of satire? Celia is alone with Volpone, who, throwing off his feigned sickness, comes upon her, 'as fresh, as hot, as high, and in as jovial plight,' as on the gala-days of the Republic, when he acted the part of the lovely Antinous. In his transport he sings a love song; his voluptuousness culminates in poetry; for poetry was then in Italy the blossom of vice. He spreads before her pearls, diamonds, carbuncles. He is in raptures at the sight of the treasures, which he causes to roll and sparkle before her eyes:

'Take these,
And wear, and lose 'em: yet remains an earring
To purchase them again, and this whole state.
A gem but worth a private patrimony,
Is nothing: we will eat such at a meal,
The heads of parrots, tongues of nightingales,
The brains of peacocks, and of estriches
Shall be our food. . . .
Conscience? 'Tis the beggar's virtue. . . .
Thy baths shall be the juice of July flowers,
Spirit of roses, and of violets,
The milk of unicorns, and panthers' breath

[1] *Volpone*, iii. 7. We pray the reader to pardon us for Ben Jonson's broadness. If I omit it, I cannot depict the sixteenth century. Grant the same indulgence to the historian as to the anatomist.

[2] *Volpone*, iii. 7.

Gather'd in bags, and mixt with Cretan wines.
Our drink shall be prepared gold and amber;
Which we will take, until my roof whirl round
With the vertigo: and my dwarf shall dance,
My eunuch sing, my fool make up the antick,
Whilst we, in changed shapes, act Ovid's tales,
Thou, like Europa now, and I like Jove,
Then I like Mars, and thou like Erycine;
So, of the rest, till we have quite run through,
And wearied all the fables of the gods.'[1]

We recognise Venice in this splendour of debauchery—Venice, the throne of Aretinus, the country of Tintoret and Giorgione. Volpone seizes Celia: 'Yield, or I'll force thee!' But suddenly Bonario, disinherited son of Corbaccio, whom Mosca had concealed there with another design, enters violently, delivers her, wounds Mosca, and accuses Volpone before the tribunal, of imposture and rape.

The three rascals who aim at being his heirs, work together to save Volpone. Corbaccio disavows his son, and accuses him of parricide. Corvino declares his wife an adulteress, the shameless mistress of Bonario. Never on the stage was seen such energy of lying, such open villany. The husband, who knows his wife to be innocent, is the most eager:

'This woman (please your fatherhoods) is a whore,
Of most hot exercise, more than a partrich,
Upon record. 1*st Adv.* No more. *C.* Neighs like a jennet.
Notary. Preserve the honour of the court. *C.* I shall,
And modesty of your most reverend ears.
And yet I hope that I may say, these eyes
Have seen her glew'd unto that piece of cedar,
That fine well-timber'd gallant; and that here
The letters may be read, thorow the horn,
That make the story perfect. . . .
3*d Adv.* His grief hath made him frantic. (*Celia swoons.*)
C. Rare! Prettily feign'd! again!'[2]

They have Volpone brought in, like a dying man; manufacture false 'testimony,' to which Voltore gives weight with his advocate's tongue, with words worth a sequin apiece. They put Celia and Bonario into prison, and Volpone is saved. This public imposture is for him only another comedy, a pleasant pastime, and a masterpiece.

'*Mosca.* To gull the court. *Volpone.* And quite divert the torrent
Upon the innocent. . . .
M. You are not taken with it enough, methinks.
V. O, more than if I had enjoy'd the wench?'[3]

To conclude, he writes a will in Mosca's favour, has his death reported, hides behind a curtain, and enjoys the looks of the would-be heirs.

[1] *Volpone*, iii. 7. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 5. [3] *Ibid.* v. 2.

They had just saved him, which makes the fun all the better; the wickedness will be all the greater and more exquisite. 'Torture 'em rarely,' Volpone says to Mosca. The latter spreads the will on the table, and reads the inventory aloud. 'Turkey carpets nine. Two cabinets, one of ebony, the other, mother-of-pearl. A perfum'd box, made of an onyx.' The heirs are stupefied with disappointment, and Mosca drives them off with insults. He says to Corvino:

> 'Why would you stay here? with what thought, what promise?
> Hear you? do you not know, I know you an ass?
> And that you would most fain have been a wittol,
> If fortune would have let you? That you are
> A declar'd cuckold, on good terms? This pearl,
> You'll say, was yours? Right: this diamond?
> I'll not deny't, but thank you. Much here else?
> It may be so. Why, think that these good works
> May help to hide your bad. . . .
> *Corv.* I am cozen'd, cheated, by a parasite slave;
> Harlot, th' hast gull'd me. *M.* Yes, sir. Stop your mouth,
> Or I shall draw the only tooth is left.
> Are not you he, that filthy covetous wretch,
> With the three legs, that here, in hope of prey,
> Have any time this three years snuffl't about,
> With your most grov'ling nose, and would have hir'd
> Me to the pois'ning of my patron, sir?
> Are not you he that have to-day in court
> Profess'd the disinheriting of your son?
> Perjur'd yourself? Go home, and die, and stink.'[1]

Volpone goes out disguised, comes to each of them in turn, and succeeds in wringing their hearts. But Mosca, who has the will, acts with a high hand, and demands of Volpone half his fortune. The dispute between the two rascals discovers their impostures, and the master, the servant, with the three would-be heirs, are sent to the galleys, to prison, to the pillory—as Corvino says, to

> 'Have mine eyes beat out with stinking fish,
> Bruis'd fruit, and rotten eggs.—'Tis well. I'm glad,
> I shall not see my shame yet.'[2]

No more vengeful comedy has been written, none more persistently athirst to make vice suffer, to unmask, triumph over, and punish it.

Where can be the gaiety of such a theatre? In caricature and farce. There is a rude gaiety, a sort of physical, external laughter which suits this combative, drinking, blustering mood. It is thus that this mood relaxes from a war-waging and murderous satire; the pastime is appropriate to the manners of the time, excellent to attract men who look upon hanging as a good joke, and laugh to see the Puritans' ears cut. Put yourself for an instant in their place, and you

[1] *Volpone*, v. 3. [2] *Ibid.* v. 12.

will think like them, that *The Silent Woman* is a masterpiece. Morose is an old monomaniac, who has a horror of noise, but loves to speak. He inhabits a street so narrow that a carriage cannot enter it. He drives off with his stick the bear-leaders and sword-players, who venture to pass under his windows. He has sent away his servant whose shoes creaked; and Mute, the new one, wears slippers 'soal'd with wool,' and only speaks in a whisper through a tube. Morose ends by forbidding the whisper, and making him reply by signs. For the rest, he is rich, he is an uncle, and ill-treats his nephew Sir Dauphine Eugenie, a man of wit, with a lack of money. You see beforehand all the tortures which poor Morose is to suffer. Sir Dauphine finds him a supposed silent woman, the beautiful Epicœne. Morose, enchanted by her brief replies and her voice which he can hardly hear, marries her, to play his nephew a trick. It is his nephew who has played him a trick. As soon as she is married, Epicœne speaks, scolds, argues as loud and as long as a dozen women:

'Why, did you think you had married a statue? or a motion only? one of the French puppets, with the eyes turn'd with a wire? or some innocent out of the hospital, that would stand with her hands thus, and a playse mouth, and look upon you?'[1]

She orders the valets to speak louder; she opens the doors wide to her friends. They arrive in troops, offering their noisy congratulations to Morose. Five or six women's tongues overwhelm him all at once with compliments, questions, advice, remonstrances. A friend of Sir Dauphine comes with a band of music, who play all together, suddenly, with their whole force. 'O, a plot, a plot, a plot, a plot, upon me! This day I shall be their anvil to work on, they will grate me asunder. 'Tis worse than the noise of a saw.'[2] A procession of servants is seen coming, with dishes in their hands; it is the bustle of the tavern which Sir Dauphine is bringing to his uncle. The guests clash the glasses, cry out, drink healths; they have with them a drum and trumpets which make great noise. Morose flees to the top of the house, puts 'a whole nest of night-caps' on his head, and stuffs up his ears. Captain Otter cries, 'Sound, Tritons o' the Thames! *Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero.*' 'Villains, murderers, sons of the earth and traitors,' cries Morose from above, 'what do you there?' The racket increases. Then the captain, somewhat 'jovial,' maligns his wife, who falls upon him and gives him a good beating. Blows, cries, music, laughter, resound like thunder. It is the poetry of uproar. Here is a subject to shake rude nerves, and raise with inextinguishable laughter the mighty chests of the companions of Drake and Essex. 'Rogues, hell-hounds, Stentors! . . . They have rent my roof, walls, and all my windows asunder, with their brazen throats!' Morose casts himself on the people with his long sword, breaks the instruments, chases the musicians, disperses the guests amidst

[1] *Epicœne*, iii. 4. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 7.

an inexpressible uproar, gnashing his teeth, looking dreadfully. Afterwards they pronounce him mad, and discuss his madness before him.[1] 'The disease in Greek is called *μανία*, in Latin *insania, furor, vel ecstasis melancholica*, that is, *egressio*, when a man *ex melancholico evadit fanaticus*. . . . But he may be but *phreneticus* yet, mistress; and *phrenetis* is only *delirium*, or so.' They talk of the books which he must read aloud to cure him. They add, by way of consolation, that his wife talks in her sleep, 'and snores like a porcpisce.' 'O, redeem me, fate; redeem me, fate!' cries the poor man.[2] 'For how many causes may a man be divorc'd, nephew?' Sir Dauphine chooses two knaves, and disguises them, one as a priest, the other as a lawyer, who launch at his head Latin terms of civil and canon law, explain to Morose the twelve cases of nullity, jingle in his ears one after another the most barbarous words in their obscure vocabulary, wrangle, and make between them as much noise as a couple of bells in a bell-tower. On their advice he declares himself impotent. The wedding-guests propose to toss him in a blanket; others demand an immediate inquisition. Fall after fall, shame after shame; nothing serves him; his wife declares that she consents to 'take him with all his faults.' The lawyer proposes another legal method; Morose shall obtain a divorce by proving that his wife is faithless. Two boasting knights, who are present, declare that they have been her lovers. Morose, in raptures, casts himself at their knees, and embraces them. Epicœne weeps, and Morose seems to be delivered. Suddenly the lawyer decides that the plan is of no avail, the infidelity having been committed before the marriage. 'O, this is worst of all worst worsts that hell could have devis'd! marry a whore! and so much noise!' There is Morose then, declared impotent and a deceived husband, at his own request, in the eyes of the world, and moreover, married for ever. Sir Dauphine comes in like a clever rascal, and as a succouring deity. 'Allow me but five hundred during life, uncle,' and I free you. Morose signs the deed of gift with alacrity; and his nephew shows him that Epicœne is a boy in disguise.[3] Add to this enchanting farce the funny parts of the two accomplished and gallant knights, who, after having boasted of their bravery, receive gratefully, and before the ladies, flips and kicks.[4] Never was coarse physical laughter more adroitly produced. In this broad coarse gaiety, this excess of noisy transport, you recognise the stout roysterer, the stalwart drinker who swallowed down torrents of Canary, and made the glass windows of the Mermaid shake with his bursts of humour.

V.

Jonson did not go beyond this; he was not a philosopher like Molière, able to grasp and dramatise the crises of human life, education, marriage,

[1] See M. de Pourceaugnac in Molière.

[2] *Epicœne*, iv. 4.

[3] *Ibid.* v. 5.

[4] Polichinelle in *Le Malade imaginaire*; Géronte in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*.

sickness, the chief characters of his country and century, the courtier, the tradesman, the hypocrite, the man of the world.[1] He remained on a lower level, in the comedy of plot,[2] the painting of the grotesque,[3] the representation of too transient subjects of ridicule,[4] too general vices.[5] If at times, as in the *Alchemist*, he has succeeded by the perfection of plot and the vigour of satire, he has miscarried more frequently by the ponderousness of his work and the lack of comic lightness. The critic in him mars the artist; his literary calculations strip him of spontaneous invention; he is too much of a writer and moralist, not enough of a mimic and an actor. But he is loftier from another side, for he is a poet; almost all writers, prose-authors, preachers even, were so at the time we speak of. Fancy abounded, as well as the perception of colours and forms, the need and wont of enjoying through the imagination and the eyes. Many of Jonson's pieces, the *Staple of News*, *Cynthia's Revels*, are fanciful and allegorical comedies, like those of Aristophanes. He there dallies with the real, and beyond the real, with characters who are but theatrical masks, abstractions personified, buffooneries, decorations, dances, music, pretty laughing whims of a picturesque and sentimental imagination. Thus, in *Cynthia's Revels*, three children come on 'pleading possession of the cloke' of black velvet, which an actor usually wore when he spoke the prologue. They draw lots for it; one of the losers, in revenge, tells the audience beforehand the incidents of the piece. The others interrupt him at every sentence, put their hands on his mouth, and taking the cloak one after the other, begin the criticism of the spectators and authors. This child's play, these gestures and voices, this little amusing dispute, divert the public from their serious thoughts, and prepare them for the oddities which they are to look upon.

We are in Greece, in the valley of Gargaphie, where Diana[6] has proclaimed 'a solemn revels.' Mercury and Cupid have come down, and begin by quarrelling; the latter says:

> 'My light feather-heel'd couz, what are you? any more than my uncle Jove's pandar? a lacquey that runs on errands for him, and can whisper a light message to a loose wench with some round volubility? . . . One that sweeps the gods' drinking-room every morning, and sets the cushions in order again, which they threw one at another's head over night?'[7]

These are the gods of good humour. Echo, awoke by Mercury, weeps for the beauteous boy Narcissus:

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[1] *L'Ecole des Femmes*, *Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, *Le Bourgeois-gentilhomme*, *Le Malade imaginaire*, *Georges Dandin*.

[2] In the style of the *Fourberies de Scapin*.

[3] In the style of the *Fâcheux*.

[4] In the style of the *Précieuses*.

[5] In the style of the plays of Destouches.

[6] By Diana, Queen Elizabeth is meant.

[7] *Cynthia's Revels*, i. 1.

'That trophy of self-love, and spoil of nature,
Who (now transformed into this drooping flower)
Hangs the repentant head, back from the stream. . . .
Witness thy youth's dear sweets, here spent untasted,
Like a fair taper, with his own flame wasted! . . .
And with thy water let this curse remain,
(As an inseparate plague,) that who but tastes
A drop thereof, may, with the instant touch,
Grow dotingly enamour'd on themselves.'[1]

The courtiers and ladies drink thereof, and behold, a sort of review of the follies of the time, arranged, as in Aristophanes, in an improbable farce, a brilliant show. A silly spendthrift, Asotus, wishes to become a man of the court, and of fashionable manners; he takes for his master Amorphus, a learned traveller, expert in gallantry, who, to believe himself, is

'An essence so sublimated and refined by travel . . . able. . . to speak the mere extraction of language; one that . . . was your first that ever enrich'd his country with the true laws of the duello; whose optiques have drunk the spirit of beauty, in some eight-score and eighteen princes' courts, where I have resided, and been there fortunate in the amours of three hundred forty and five ladies (all nobly if not princely descended) . . . in all so happy, as even admiration herself doth seem to fasten her kisses upon me.'[2]

Asotus learns at this good school the language of the court, fortifies himself like other people with quibbles, learned oaths, and metaphors; he fires off in succession supersubtle tirades, and duly imitates the grimaces and tortuous style of his masters. Then, when he has drunk the water of the fountain, becoming suddenly pert and rash, he proposes to all comers a tournament of 'court compliment.' This odd tournament is held before the ladies; it comprises four jousts, and at each the trumpets sound. The combatants perform in succession 'the bare accost; the better regard; the solemn address; and the perfect close.'[3] In this grave buffoonery the courtiers are beaten. The severe Crites, the moralist of the play, copies their language, and pierces them with their own weapons. Already, with grand declamation, he had rebuked them thus:

'O vanity,
How are thy painted beauties doated on,
By light, and empty ideots! how pursu'd
With open and extended appetite!
How they do sweat, and run themselves from breath,
Rais'd on their toes, to catch thy airy forms,
Still turning giddy, till they reel like drunkards,
That buy the merry madness of one hour,
With the long irksomeness of following time!'[4]

To complete the overthrow of the vices, appear two symbolical masques,

[1] *Cynthia's Revels*, i. 2. [2] *Ibid.* i. 3. [3] *Ibid.* iv. 5. [4] *Ibid.* i. 5.

representing the contrary virtues. They pass gravely before the spectators, in splendid array, and the noble verses exchanged by the goddess and her companions raise the mind to the lofty regions of serene morality, whither the poet desires to carry us:

> 'Queen, and huntress, chaste and fair,
> Now the sun is laid to sleep,
> Seated in thy silver chair,
> State in wonted manner keep. . . .
> Lay thy bow of pearl apart,
> And thy crystal shining quiver;
> Give unto the flying hart
> Space to breathe, how short soever.' [1]

In the end, bidding the dancers to unmask, Cynthia shows that the vices have disguised themselves as virtues. She condemns them to make fit reparation, and to bathe themselves in Helicon. Two by two they go off singing a palinode, whilst the chorus sings the supplication 'Good Mercury defend us.'[2] Is it an opera or a comedy? It is a lyrical comedy; and if we do not discover in it the airy lightness of Aristophanes, at least we encounter, as in the *Birds* and the *Frogs*, the contrasts and medleys of poetic invention, which, through caricature and ode, the real and the impossible, the present and the past, comprehending the four quarters of the globe, simultaneously unites all kinds of incompatibilities, and culls all flowers.

Jonson went further than this, and entered the domain of pure poetry. He wrote delicate, voluptuous, charming love poems, worthy of the ancient idyllic muse.[3] Above all, he was the great, the inexhaustible inventor of Masques, a kind of masquerades, ballets, poetic dances, in which all the magnificence and the imagination of the English Renaissance is displayed. The Greek gods, and all the ancient Olympus, the mythic personages whom the artists of the time delineate in their pictures; the antique heroes of popular legends; all worlds, the actual, the abstract, the divine, the human, the ancient, the modern, are searched by his hands, brought on the stage to furnish costumes, harmonious groups, emblems, songs, whatever can excite, intoxicate the artistic sense. The *élite*, moreover, of the kingdom is there on the stage. They are not buffoons figuring in borrowed clothes, clumsily worn, for which they are still in debt to the tailor; they are ladies of the court, great lords, the queen; in all the splendour of their rank and pride, with real diamonds, bent on displaying their riches, so that the whole splendour of the national life is concentrated in the opera which they enact, like jewels in a casket. What array! what profusion of splendours! what medley of strange characters, gipsies, witches, gods, heroes, pontiffs, gnomes, fantastic beings! How many meta-

[1] *Cynthia's Revels*, v. 6.
[2] *Ibid.* v., last scene.
[3] *Celebration of Charis—Miscellaneous Poems.*

morphoses, jousts, dances, marriage songs! What variety of scenery, architecture, floating isles, triumphal arches, symbolic spheres! Gold glitters; jewels flash; purple absorbs the lustre-lights in its costly folds; streams of brightness play upon the silken pleats; diamonds twisted, darting flame, clasp the bare bosoms of women; necklets of pearl float, loop after loop, down the silver-sown brocaded dresses; gold embroidery, weaving whimsical arabesques, depicts upon their dresses flowers, fruits, and figures, setting picture within picture. The steps of the throne bear groups of Cupids, each with a torch in his hand:[1] On either side the fountains cast up plumes of pearls; the musicians, in purple and scarlet, laurel-crowned, make harmony in the bowers. The trains of masques cross, commingling their groups; 'the one half in orange-tawny and silver, the other in sea-green and silver. The bodies and short skirts (were of) white and gold to both.'

Such pageants Jonson wrote year after year, almost to the end of his life, true eye-feasts, like a procession of Titian. Even when he grew to be old, his imagination, like that of Titian, remained abundant and fresh. Though forsaken, gasping on his bed, feeling the approach of death, in his supreme bitterness he did not lose his tone, but wrote *The Sad Shepherd*, the most graceful and pastoral of his pieces. Consider that this beautiful dream was dreamed in a sick-chamber, to an accompaniment of bottles, physic, doctors, with a nurse at his side, amidst the anxieties of poverty and the choking-fits of a dropsy! He is transported to a green forest, in the days of Robin Hood, amidst jovial chace and the great barking greyhounds. There are the malicious fairies, the Oberon and Titania, who lead men aflounder in misfortune. There are open-souled lovers, the Daphne and Chloe, tasting with awe the painful sweetness of the first kiss. There lived Earine, whom the stream has 'suck'd in,' whom her lover, in his madness, will not cease to lament:

> 'Earine,
> Who had her very being, and her name
> With the first knots or buddings of the spring,
> Born with the primrose or the violet,
> Or earliest roses blown: when Cupid smil'd,
> And Venus led the graces out to dance,
> And all the flowers and sweets in nature's lap
> Leap'd out, and made their solemn conjuration
> To last but while she liv'd.' . . .[2]
> 'But she, as chaste as was her name, Earine,
> Dy'd undeflower'd: and now her sweet soul hovers
> Here in the air above us.'[3]

Above the poor old paralytic artist, poetry still hovers like a haze of light. Yes, he had cumbered himself with science, clogged himself with

[1] *Masque of Beauty.* [2] *The Sad Shepherd*, i. 5. [3] *Ibid.* iii. 2.

theories, constituted himself theatrical critic and social censor, filled his soul with unrelenting indignation, fostered a combative and morose disposition; but heaven's dreams never deserted him. He is the brother of Shakspeare.

VI.

So now at last we are in the presence of one, whom we perceived before us through all the vistas of the Renaissance, like some vast oak to which all the forest ways converge. I will treat of Shakspeare by himself. In order to take him in completely, we must have a wide and open space. And yet how shall we comprehend him? how lay bare his inner constitution? Lofty words, eulogies, all is vain by his side; he needs no praise, but comprehension merely; and he can only be comprehended by the aid of science. As the complicated revolutions of the heavenly bodies become intelligible only by use of a superior calculus, as the delicate transformations of vegetation and life need for their comprehension the intervention of the most difficult chemical processes, so the great works of art can be interpreted only by the most advanced psychological systems; and we need the loftiest of all these to attain to Shakspeare's level—to the level of his age and his work, of his genius and of his art.

After all practical experience and accumulated observations of the soul, we find as the result that wisdom and knowledge are in man only effects and fortuities. Man has no permanent and distinct force to secure truth to his intelligence, and common sense to his conduct. On the contrary, he is naturally unreasonable and deceived. The parts of his inner mechanism are like the wheels of clockwork, which of themselves go blindly, carried away by impulse and weight, and which yet sometimes, by virtue of a certain unison, end by indicating the hour. This final intelligent motion is not natural, but fortuitous; not spontaneous, but forced; not inherent, but acquired. The clock did not always go regularly; it had to be regulated little by little, with much difficulty. Its regularity is not ensured; it may go wrong in an instant. Its regularity is not complete; it only approximately marks the time. The mechanical force of each piece is always present, ready to drag all the rest from their proper action, and to disarrange the whole agreement. So ideas, once in the mind, pull each blindly and separately, and their imperfect agreement threatens confusion every moment. Strictly speaking, man is idiotic, as the body is sick, by nature; reason and health come to us as a momentary success, a lucky accident.[1] If we forget this, it is because we are now regulated, dulled, deadened, and because our internal motion has become gradually, by friction and

[1] This idea may be expanded psychologically: external perception, memory, are real hallucinations, etc. This is the analytical aspect; under another aspect reason and health are the natural goals.

tension, half harmonised with the motion of external things. But this is only a semblance; and the dangerous primitive forces remain untamed and independent under the order, which seems to restrain them. Let a great danger arise, a revolution break out, they will make an eruption and an explosion, almost as terribly as in the earlier times. For an idea is not a mere inner mark, employed to designate one aspect of things, inert, always ready to fall into order with other similar ones, so as to make an exact whole. However it may be reduced and disciplined, it still retains a visible tinge which shows its likeness to an hallucination; a degree of individual persistence which shows its likeness to a monomania; a network of particular affinities which shows its likeness to the ravings of delirium. Being such, it is beyond question the rudiment of a nightmare, a habit, an absurdity. Let it become once developed in its entirety, as its tendency leads it,[1] and you will find that it is essentially an active and complete image, a vision drawing along with it a train of dreams and sensations, which increases of itself, suddenly, by a sort of manifold and absorbing growth, and which ends by possessing, shaking, exhausting the whole man. After this, another, perhaps entirely opposite, and so on successively: there is nothing else in man, no free and distinct power; he is in himself but the process of these headlong impulses and swarming imaginations: civilisation has mutilated, attenuated, but not destroyed them; fits, shocks, transports, sometimes at long intervals a sort of transient partial equilibrium: this is his real life, the life of a lunatic, who now and then simulates reason, but who is in reality 'such stuff as dreams are made on;'[2] and this is man, as Shakspeare has conceived him. No writer, not even Molière, has penetrated so far beneath the semblance of common sense and logic in which the human machine is enclosed, in order to crush the brute powers which constitute its substance and its mainspring.

How did Shakspeare succeed? and by what extraordinary instinct did he divine the remote conclusions, the deepest insights of physiology and psychology? He had a complete imagination; his whole genius is in that single word. A small word, which seems commonplace and hollow. Let us examine it closer, to understand what it contains. When we think a thing, we, ordinary men, we only think a part of it; we see one side, some isolated mark, sometimes two or three marks together; for what is beyond, our sight fails us; the infinite network of its infinitely-complicated and multiplied properties escapes us; we feel vaguely that there is something beyond our shallow ken, and this vague suspicion is the only part of our idea which at all reveals to us the great beyond. We are like tyro-naturalists, quiet people of limited understanding, who, wishing to represent an animal, recall its name and ticket, with some indistinct image of its hide and figure; but

[1] See Spinoza and D. Stewart: Conception in its natural state is belief.

[2] *Tempest*, iv. 1.

their mind rests there. If it so happens that they wish to complete their knowledge, they lead their memory, by regular classifications, over the principal characters of the beast, and slowly, discursively, gradually, bring at last the bare anatomy before their eyes. To this their idea is reduced, even when perfected; to this also most frequently is our conception reduced, even when elaborated. What a distance there is between this conception and the object, how imperfectly and meanly the one represents the other, to what extent this mutilates that; how the consecutive idea, disjointed in little, regularly arranged and inert fragments, represents but slightly the complete, organised, living thing, ever in action, and ever transformed, words cannot explain. Picture to yourself, instead of this poor dry idea, propped up by a miserable mechanical linkwork of thought, the complete idea, that is, an inner representation, so abundant and full, that it exhausts all the properties and relations of the object, all its inward and outward aspects; that it exhausts them instantaneously; that it conceives of the animal all at once, its colour, the play of the light upon its skin, its form, the quivering of its outstretched limbs, the flash of its eyes, and at the same time its passion of the moment, its excitement, its dash; and beyond this its instincts, their composition, their causes, their history; so that the hundred thousand characteristics which make up its condition and its nature find their analogues in the imagination which concentrates and reflects them: there you have the artist's conception, the poet's—Shakspeare's; so superior to that of the logician, of the mere savant or man of the world, the only one capable of penetrating to the basis of things, of extricating the inner from beneath the outer man, of feeling through sympathy, and imitating without effort, the disorderly roundabout of human imaginations and impressions, of reproducing life with its infinite fluctuations, its apparent contradictions, its concealed logic; in short, to create as nature creates. This is what is done by the other artists of this age; they have the same kind of mind, and the same idea of life: you will find in Shakspeare only the same faculties, with a still stronger impulse; the same idea, with a still more prominent relief.

CHAPTER IV.

Shakspeare.

I. Life and character of Shakspeare—Family—Youth—Marriage—He becomes an actor—*Adonis*—Sonnets—Loves—Humour—Conversation—Melancholy—The constitution of the productive and sympathetic character—Prudence—Fortune—Retirement.

II. Style—Images—Excesses—Incongruities—Copiousness—Difference between the creative and analytic conception.

III. Manners—Familiar intercourse—Violent bearing—Harsh language—Conversation and action—Agreement of manners and style.

IV. The *dramatis personæ*—All of the same family—Brutes and idiots—Caliban, Ajax, Cloten, Polonius, the Nurse—How the mechanical imagination can precede or survive reason.

V. Men of wit—Difference between the wit of reasoners and of artists—Mercutio, Beatrice, Rosalind, Benedict, the clowns—Falstaff.

VI. Women—Desdemona, Virginia, Juliet, Miranda, Imogen, Cordelia, Ophelia, Volumnia—How Shakspeare represents love—Why he bases virtue on instinct or passion.

VII. Villains—Iago, Richard III.—How excessive lusts and the lack of conscience are the natural province of the impassioned imagination.

VIII. Principal characters—Excess and disease of the imagination—Lear, Othello, Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Macbeth, Hamlet—Comparison of Shakspeare's psychology with that of the French tragic authors.

IX. Fancy—Agreement of imagination with observation in Shakspeare—Interesting nature of sentimental and romantic comedy—*As you Like it*—Idea of existence—*Midsummer Night's Dream*—Idea of love—Harmony of all parts of the work—Harmony between the artist and his work.

I AM about to describe an extraordinary species of mind, perplexing to all the French modes of analysis and reasoning, all-powerful, excessive, equally master of the sublime and the base; the most creative that ever engaged in the exact copy of the details of actual existence, in the dazzling caprice of fancy, in the profound complications of superhuman passions; a nature poetical, immoral, inspired, superior to reason by the sudden revelations of his seer's-madness; so extreme in joy and pain, so abrupt of gait, so stormy and impetuous in his transports, that this great age alone could have cradled such a child.

I.

Of Shakspeare all came from within—I mean from his soul and his genius; external circumstances contributed but slightly to his development.[1] He was intimately bound up with his age; that is, he knew by experience the manners of country, court, and town; he had visited the heights, depths, the middle regions of the condition of mankind; nothing more. For the rest, his life was commonplace; the irregularities, troubles, passions, successes through which he passed, were, on the whole, such as we meet with everywhere else.[2] His father, a glover and wool stapler, in very easy circumstances, having married a sort of country heiress, had become high-bailiff and chief alderman in his little town; but when Shakspeare reached the age of fourteen he was on the verge of ruin, mortgaging his wife's property, obliged to resign his municipal offices, and to remove his son from school to assist him in his business. The young fellow applied himself to it as well as he could, not without some scrapes and escapades: if we are to believe tradition, he was one of the thirsty souls of the place, with a mind to support the reputation of his little town in its drinking powers. Once, they say, having been beaten at Bideford in one of these ale-bouts, he returned staggering from the fight, or rather could not return, and passed the night with his comrades under an apple-tree by the roadside. Without doubt he had already begun to write verses, to rove about like a genuine poet, taking part in the noisy rustic feasts, the gay pastoral plays, the rich and bold outbreak of pagan and poetical life, as it was then to be found in an English village. At all events, he was not a pattern of propriety, and his passions were as precocious as they were reckless. While not yet nineteen years old, he married the daughter of a substantial yeoman, about eight years older than himself—and not too soon, as she was about to become a mother.[3] Other of his outbreaks were no more fortunate. It seems that he was fond of poaching, after the manner of the time, being 'much given to all unluckinesse in stealing venison and rabbits,' says the Rev. Richard Davies;[4] 'particularly from Sir —— Lucy, who had him oft whipt and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly the country; . . . but his reveng was so great, that he is his Justice Clodpate.' Moreover, about this time Shakspeare's father was in prison, his affairs were desperate, and he himself had three children, following one close upon the other; he must live, and life was hardly possible for him in his native town. He went to

[1] Halliwell's *Life of Shakspeare.*

[2] Born 1564, died 1616. He adapted plays as early as 1591. The first play entirely from his pen appeared in 1593.—PAYNE COLLIER.

[3] Mr. Halliwell and other commentators try to prove that at this time the preliminary trothplight was regarded as the real marriage; that this trothplight had taken place, and that there was therefore no irregularity in Shakspeare's conduct.

[4] Halliwell, 123.

London, and took to the stage: took the lowest parts, was a 'servant' in the theatre, that is, an apprentice, or perhaps a supernumerary. They even said that he had begun still lower, and that to earn his bread he had held gentlemen's horses at the door of the theatre.[1] At all events he tasted misery, and felt, not in imagination but in fact, the sharp thorn of care, humiliation, disgust, forced labour, public discredit, the power of the people. He was a comedian, one of 'His Majesty's poor players,'[2]—a sad trade, degraded in all ages by the contrasts and the falsehoods inseparable from it; still more degraded then by the brutalities of the crowd, who not seldom would stone the actors, and by the severities of the magistrates, who would sometimes condemn them to lose their ears. He felt it, and spoke of it with bitterness:

'Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear.'[3]

And again:

'When in disgrace with fortune[4] and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed. . . .
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in those thoughts myself almost despising.'[5]

We shall find further on the traces of this long-enduring disgust, in his melancholy characters, as where he says:

'For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin?'[6]

But the worst of this degraded position is, that it eats into the soul. In the company of buffoons we become buffoons: it is vain to wish to keep clean, if you live in a dirty place; it cannot be. No matter if a man braces himself; necessity drives and soils him. The machinery of the decorations, the tawdriness and medley of the costumes, the smell of

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[1] All these anecdotes are traditions, and consequently more or less doubtful; but the other facts are authentic.

[2] Terms of an extant document. He is named along with Burbadge and Greene.

[3] *Sonnet* 110.

[4] See *Sonnets* 91 and 111; also *Hamlet*, iii. 2. Many of Hamlet's words would come better from the mouth of an actor than a prince. See also the 66th *Sonnet*, 'Tired with all these.'

[5] *Sonnet* 29.

[6] *Hamlet*, iii. 1.

the tallow and the candles, in contrast with the parade of refinement and loftiness, all the cheats and sordidness of the representation, the bitter alternative of hissing or applause, the keeping of the highest and lowest company, the habit of sporting with human passions, easily unhinge the soul, drive it down the slope of excess, tempt it to loose manners, green-room adventures, the loves of strolling actresses. Shakspeare escaped them no more than Molière, and grieved for it, like Molière:

> 'O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
> That did not better for my life provide
> Than public means which public manners breeds.'[1]

They used to relate in London, how his comrade Burbadge, who played Richard III., having a rendezvous with the wife of a citizen, Shakspeare went before, was well received, and was pleasantly occupied when Burbadge arrived, to whom he sent the message, that William the Conqueror came before Richard III.[2] You may take this as an example of the tricks and somewhat coarse intrigues which are planned, and follow in quick succession, on this stage. Outside the theatre he lived with fashionable young nobles, Pembroke, Montgomery, Southampton,[3] and others, whose hot and licentious youth fed his imagination and senses by the example of Italian pleasures and elegances. Add to this the rapture and transport of poetical nature, and this afflux, this boiling over of all the powers and desires which takes place in brains of this kind, when the world for the first time opens before them, and you will understand the *Venus and Adonis*, 'the first heir of his invention.' In fact, it is a first cry, a cry in which the whole man is displayed. Never was seen a heart so quivering to the touch of beauty, of beauty of every kind, so ravished with the freshness and splendour of things, so eager and so excited in adoration and enjoyment, so violently and entirely carried to the very limit of voluptuousness. His Venus is unique; no painting of Titian's has a more brilliant and delicious colouring;[4] no strumpet-goddess of Tintoret or Giorgione is more soft and beautiful:

> 'With blindfold fury she begins to forage,
> Her face doth reek and smoke, her blood doth boil. . . .
> And glutton-like she feeds, yet never filleth;
> Her lips are conquerors, his lips obey,
> Paying what ransom the insulter willeth;
> Whose vulture thought doth pitch the price so high,
> That she will draw his lips' rich treasure dry.'[5]

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[1] *Sonnet* 111.

[2] Anecdote written in 1602 on the authority of Tooley the actor.

[3] The Earl of Southampton was nineteen years old when Shakspeare dedicated his *Adonis* to him.

[4] See Titian's picture, Loves of the Gods, at Blenheim.

[5] *Venus and Adonis*, *v.* 548–553.

'Even as an empty eagle, sharp by fast,
Tires with her beak on feathers, flesh and bone,
Shaking her wings, devouring all in haste,
Till either gorge be stuff'd or prey be gone;
Even so she kiss'd his brow, his cheek, his chin,
And where she ends she doth anew begin.' [1]

All is taken by storm, the senses first, the eyes dazzled by carnal beauty, but the heart also from whence the poetry overflows; the fulness of youth inundates even inanimate things; the landscape looks charming amidst the rays of the rising sun, the air, saturated with brightness, makes a gala-day:

'Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty;
Who doth the world so gloriously behold
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnish'd gold.' [2]

An admirable debauch of imagination and rapture, yet disquieting; for such a mood will carry one a long way.[3] No fair and frail dame in London was without *Adonis* on her table.[4] Perhaps he perceived that he had transcended the bounds, for the tone of his next poem, the *Rape of Lucrece*, is quite different; but as he had already a spirit wide enough to embrace at the same time, as he did afterwards in his dramas, the two extremes of things, he continued none the less to follow his bent. The 'sweet abandonment of love' was the great occupation of his life; he was tender-hearted, and he was a poet: nothing more is required to be smitten, deceived, to suffer, to traverse without pause the circle of illusions and pains, which whirls and whirls round, and never ends.

He had many loves of this kind, amongst others one for a sort of Marion Delorme, a miserable blind despotic passion, of which he felt the oppression and the shame, but from which nevertheless he could not and would not deliver himself. Nothing can be sadder than his confessions, or mark better the madness of love, and the sentiment of human weakness:

'When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies.' [5]

So said Alceste of Célimène; [6] but what a soiled Célimène is the creature before whom Shakspeare kneels, with as much of scorn as of desire!

'Those lips of thine,
That have profaned their scarlet ornaments

[1] *Venus and Adonis*, v. 55–60. [2] *Ibid.* v. 853–858.
[3] Compare the first pieces of Alfred de Musset, *Contes d'Italie et d'Espagne*.
[4] Crawley, quoted by Ph. Chasles, *Etudes sur Shakspeare*. [5] *Sonnet* 138.
[6] Two characters in Molière's *Misanthrope*. The scene referred to is Act v. 7.—TR.

And seal'd false bonds of love as oft as mine,
Robb'd others' beds' revenues of their rents.
Be it lawful I love thee, as thou lov'st those
Whom thine eyes woo as mine importune thee.'[1]

This is plain-speaking and deep shamelessness of soul, such as we find only in the stews; and these are the intoxications, the outbreaks, the delirium into which the most refined artists fall, when they resign their own noble hand to these soft, voluptuous, and clinging ones. They are higher than princes, and they descend to the lowest depths of passion. Good and evil then lose their names; all things are inverted:

'How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!
O, in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose!
That tongue that tells the story of thy days,
Making lascivious comments on thy sport,
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise;
Naming thy name blesses an ill report.'[2]

What are proof, reason, the will, honour itself, when the passion is so absorbing? What, think you, can be said further to a man who answers, 'I know all that you are going to say, and what does it all amount to?' Great loves are inundations, which drown all repugnance and all delicacy of soul, all preconceived opinions and all accepted principles. Thenceforth the heart is found dead to all ordinary pleasures; it can only feel and breathe on one side. Shakspeare envies the keys of the instrument over which his mistress' fingers run. If he looks at flowers, it is she whom he pictures beyond them; and the mad splendours of dazzling poetry flood him repeatedly, as soon as he thinks of those glowing black eyes:

'From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him.'[3]

He saw none of it:

'Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose.'[4]

All this sweetness of spring was but her perfume and her shade:

'The forward violet thus I did chide:
"Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
If not from my love's breath? The purple pride,
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed."

[1] *Sonnet* 142.
[2] *Sonnet* 95.
[3] *Sonnet* 98.
[4] *Ibid.*

The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair:
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair:
A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath; . . .
More flowers I noted, yet I none could see
But sweet or colour it had stol'n from thee.' [1]

Passionate trifles, delicious affectations, worthy of Heine and the contemporaries of Dante, which tell us of long rapturous dreams centred around one object. Under a domination so imperious and sustained, what sentiment could maintain its ground? That of family? He was married and had children,—a family which he went to see 'once a year;' and it was probably on his return from one of these journeys that he used the words above quoted. Conscience? 'Love is too young to know what conscience is.' Jealousy and anger?

'For, thou betraying me, I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body's treason.' [2]

Repulses?

'He is contented thy poor drudge to be,
To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side.' [3]

He is no longer young; she loves another, a handsome, young, light-haired fellow, his own dearest friend, whom he has presented to her, and whom she wishes to seduce:

'Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side.' [4]

And when she has succeeded in this,[5] he dares not confess it to himself, but suffers all, like Molière. What wretchedness there is in these trifles of every-day life! How man's thoughts instinctively place by Shakspeare's side the great unhappy French poet (Molière), also a philosopher by nature, but more of a professional laugher, a mocker of passionate old men, a bitter railer at deceived husbands, who, after having played one of his most approved comedies, said aloud to a companion, 'My dear friend, I am in despair; my wife does not love me!' Neither glory, nor work, nor invention satisfy these vehement

[1] *Sonnet* 99. [2] *Sonnet* 141. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Sonnet* 144; also the *Passionate Pilgrim*, 2.
[5] This new interpretation of the *Sonnets* is due to the ingenious and learned conjectures of M. Ph. Chasles.—For a short history of these *Sonnets*, see Dyce's *Shakspeare*, i. pp. 96–102. This learned editor says: 'I contend that allusions scattered through the whole series are not to be hastily referred to the personal circumstances of Shakspeare.'—TR.

souls; love alone can fill them, because, with their senses and heart, it contents also their brain; and all the powers of man, imagination like the rest, find in it their concentration and their employment. 'Love is my sin,' he said, as did Musset and Heine; and in the *Sonnets* we find traces of yet other passions, equally abandoned; one in particular, seemingly for a great lady. The first half of his dramas, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, preserve the warm imprint more completely; and we have only to consider his latest women's character,[1] to see with what exquisite tenderness, what full adoration, he loved them to the end.

In this is all his genius; his was one of those delicate souls which, like a perfect instrument of music, vibrate of themselves at the slightest touch. This fine sensibility was the first thing observed in him. 'My darling Shakspeare,' 'Sweet Swan of Avon:' these words of Ben Jonson only confirm what his contemporaries reiterate. He was affectionate and kind, 'civil in demeanour, and excellent in the qualitie he professes;'[2] if he had the transports, he had also the effusion of true artists; he was loved, men were delighted in his company; nothing is more sweet or engaging than this charm, this half-feminine abandonment in a man. His wit in conversation was ready, ingenious, nimble; his gaiety brilliant; his imagination easy, and so copious, that, as his comrades tell us, he never erased what he had written—at least when he wrote out a scene for the second time: it was the idea which he would change, not the words, by an after-glow of poetic thought, not with a painful tinkering of the verse. All these characteristics are combined in a single one: he had a sympathetic genius; I mean that naturally he knew how to forget himself and become transfused into all the objects which he conceived. Look around you at the great authors of your time, try to approach them, to become acquainted with

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[1] Miranda, Desdemona, Viola. The following are the first words of the Duke in *Twelfth Night*:—

'If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! it had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour! Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love! how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price,
Even in a minute: so full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high-fantastical.'

[2] H. Chettle, in repudiating Greene's sarcasm, attributed to him.

them, to see them as they think, and you will observe the full force of this word. By an extraordinary instinct, they put themselves at once in the position of existences: men, animals, flowers, plants, landscapes, whatever the objects are, living or not, they feel by intuition the forces and tendencies which produce the visible external; and their soul, infinitely complex, becomes by its ceaseless metamorphoses, a sort of abstract of the universe. This is why they seem to live more than other men; they have no need to be taught, they divine. I have seen such a man, apropos of a piece of armour, a costume, a collection of furniture, enter into the middle-age more deeply than three savants together. They reconstruct, as they build, naturally, surely, by an inspiration which is a winged chain of reasoning. Shakspeare had only an imperfect education, 'small Latin and less Greek,' barely French and Italian,[1] nothing else; he had not travelled, he had only read the current literature, he had picked up a few law words in the court of his little town; reckon up, if you can, all that he knew of man and of history. These men see more objects at a time; they grasp them more closely than other men, more quickly and thoroughly; their mind is full, and runs over. They do not rest in simple reasoning; at every idea their whole being, reflections, images, emotions, are set aquiver. See them at it; they gesticulate, mimic their thought, brim over with comparisons; even in their talk they are imaginative and original, with familiarity and boldness of speech, now happily, always irregularly, according to the whims and starts of the adventurous improvisation. The sway, the brilliancy of their language is marvellous; so are their fits, the wide leaps with which they couple widely-removed ideas, annihilating distance, passing from pathos to humour, from vehemence to gentleness. This extraordinary rapture is the last thing to quit them. If perchance ideas fail, or if their melancholy is too harsh, they still speak and produce, even if it be buffooneries; they become clowns, though at their own expense, and to their own hurt. I know one who will mutter bad puns when he thinks he is dying, or has a mind to kill himself; the inner wheel continues to turn, even upon nothing, that wheel which man must needs see ever turning, even though it tear him as it turns; his clown-tricks are an outlet; you will find him, this inextinguishable fellow, this ironical puppet, at Ophelia's tomb, at Cleopatra's death-bed, at Juliet's funeral. High or low, these men must always be at some extreme. They feel their good and their ill too deeply; they expand the state of their soul too widely, by a sort of involuntary novel. After the scandals and the disgusts by which they debase themselves beyond measure, they rise and become exalted in a marvellous fashion, even trembling with pride and joy. 'Haply,' says Shakspeare, after one of these dull moods:

[1] Dyce, *Shakspeare*, i. 27: 'Of French and Italian, I apprehend, he knew but little.'—TR.

'Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate.'[1]

Then all fades away, as in a grate where a stronger flame than usual has left no substantial fuel behind it.

'That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.'[2] . . .
'No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
If thinking on me then should make you woe.'[3]

These sudden alternations of joy and sadness, divine transports and deep melancholies, exquisite tenderness and womanly depressions, depict the poet, extreme in emotions, ceaselessly troubled with grief or merriment, sensible of the slightest shock, more strong, more dainty in enjoyment and suffering than other men, capable of more intense and sweeter dreams, within whom is stirred an imaginary world of graceful or terrible beings, all impassioned like their author.

Such as I have described him, however, he found his resting-place. Early, at least from an external point, he settled down to an orderly, sensible, citizen-like existence, engaged in business, provident of the future. He remained on the stage for at least seventeen years, though taking secondary parts;[4] he sets his wits at the same time to the touching up of plays with so much activity, that Greene called him 'an upstart crow beautified with our feathers; . . . an absolute '*Johannes factotum*, in his owne conceyt the onely shake-scene in a countrey.'[5] At the age of thirty-three he had amassed enough to buy at Stratford a house with two barns and two gardens, and he went on steadier and steadier in the same course. A man attains only to easy circumstances by his own labour; if he gains wealth, it is by making others labour for him. This is why, to the trades of actor and author, Shakspeare added those of manager and director of a theatre. He acquired a partial proprietorship in the Blackfriars and Globe theatres, farmed

[1] *Sonnet* 29. [2] *Sonnet* 73. [3] *Sonnet* 71.
[4] The part in which he excelled was that of the ghost in *Hamlet*.
[5] Greene's *A Groatsworth of Wit*, etc.

tithes, bought large pieces of land, more houses, gave a dowry to his daughter Susanna, and finally retired to his native town on his property, in his own house, like a good landlord, an honest citizen, who manages his fortune fitly, and takes his share of municipal work. He had an income of two or three hundred pounds, which would be equivalent to about eight or twelve hundred at the present time, and according to tradition, lived cheerfully and on good terms with his neighbours; at all events, it does not seem that he thought much about his literary glory, for he did not even take the trouble to collect and publish his works. One of his daughters married a physician, the other a wine merchant; the last did not even know how to sign her name. He lent money, and cut a good figure in this little world. Strange close; one which at first sight resembles more that of a shopkeeper than of a poet. Must we attribute it to that English instinct which places happiness in the life of a country gentleman and a landlord with a good rent-roll, well connected, surrounded by comforts, who quietly rejoices in his settled respectability,[1] his domestic authority, and his county standing? Or rather, was Shakspeare, like Voltaire, a common-sense man, though of an imaginative brain, keeping a sound judgment under the sparkling of his genius, prudent from scepticism, economical through lack of independence, and capable, after going the round of human ideas, of deciding with Candide,[2] that the best thing one can do is 'to cultivate one's garden?' I had rather think, as his full and solid head suggests,[3] that by the mere force of his overflowing imagination he escaped, like Goethe, the perils of an overflowing imagination; that in depicting passion, he succeeded, like Goethe, in quelling passion in his own case; that the lava did not break out in his conduct, because it found issue in his poetry; that his theatre redeemed his life; and that, having passed, by sympathy, through every kind of folly and wretchedness that is incident to human existence, he was able to settle down amidst them with a calm and melancholy smile, listening, for distraction, to the aerial music of the fancies in which he revelled.[4] I am willing to believe, lastly, that in frame as in the rest, he belonged to his great generation and his great age; that with him, as with Rabelais, Titian, Michael Angelo, and Rubens, the solidity of his muscles balanced the sensibility of his nerves; that in those days the human machine, more severely tried and more firmly constructed, could withstand the storms of passion and the fire of inspiration; that soul and body were still at equilibrium; that genius was then a blossom, and not, as now, a disease. Of all this we can but conjecture: if we would see the man more closely, we must seek him in his works.

[1] 'He was a respectable man.' 'A good word; what does it mean?' 'He kept a gig.'—(From Thurtell's trial for the murder of Weare.)

[2] The model of an optimist, the hero of one of Voltaire's tales.—TR.

[3] See his portraits, and in particular his bust.

[4] Especially in his later plays: *Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*.

II.

Let us then look for the man, and in his style. The style explains the work; whilst showing the principal features of the genius, it infers the rest. When we have once grasped the dominant faculty, we see the whole artist developed like a flower.

Shakspeare imagines with copiousness and excess; he spreads metaphors profusely over all he writes; every instant abstract ideas are changed into images; it is a series of paintings which is unfolded in his mind. He does not seek them, they come of themselves; they crowd within him, covering his arguments; they dim with their brightness the pure light of logic. He does not labour to explain or prove; picture on picture, image on image, he is for ever copying the strange and splendid visions which are engendered one within another, and are heaped up within him. Compare to our dull writers this passage, which I take at hazard from a tranquil dialogue:

> 'The single and peculiar life is bound,
> With all the strength and ardour of the mind,
> To keep itself from noyance; but much more
> That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest
> The lives of many. The cease of majesty
> Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw
> What's near it with it: it is a massy wheel,
> Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
> To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
> Are mortised and adjoin'd; which, when it falls,
> Each small annexment, petty consequence,
> Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
> Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.'[1]

Here we have three successive images to express the same thought. It is a whole blossoming; a bough grows from the trunk, from that another, which is multiplied into numerous fresh branches. Instead of a smooth road, traced by a regular line of dry and well-fixed stakes, you enter a wood, crowded with interwoven trees and luxuriant bushes, which conceal you and close your path, which delight and dazzle your eyes by the magnificence of their verdure and the wealth of their bloom. You are astonished at first, modern mind that you are, business man, used to the clear dissertations of classical poetry; you become cross; you think the author is joking, and that through self-esteem and bad taste he is misleading you and himself in his garden thickets. By no means; if he speaks thus, it is not from choice, but of necessity; metaphor is not his whim, but the form of his thought. In the height of passion, he imagines still. When Hamlet, in despair, remembers his father's noble form, he sees the mythological pictures with which the taste of the age filled the very streets:

[1] *Hamlet*, iii. 3.

'A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,'[1]

This charming vision, in the midst of a bloody invective, proves that there lurks a painter underneath the poet. Involuntarily and out of season, he tears off the tragic mask which covered his face; and the reader discovers, behind the contracted features of this terrible mask, a graceful and inspired smile of which he had not dreamed.

Such an imagination must needs be vehement. Every metaphor is a convulsion. Whosoever involuntarily and naturally transforms a dry idea into an image, has his brain on fire: true metaphors are flaming apparitions, which are like a picture in a flash of lightning. Never, I think, in any nation of Europe, or in any age of history, has so deep a passion been seen. Shakspeare's style is a compound of furious expressions. No man has submitted words to such a contortion. Mingled contrasts, raving exaggerations, apostrophes, exclamations, the whole fury of the ode, inversion of ideas, accumulation of images, the horrible and the divine, jumbled into the same line; it seems to my fancy as though he never writes a word without shouting it. 'What have I done?' the queen asks Hamlet. He answers:

'Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows
As false as dicers' oaths: O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words: heaven's face doth glow;
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.'[2]

It is the style of phrensy. Yet I have not given all. The metaphors are all exaggerated, the ideas all verge on the absurd. All is transformed and disfigured by the whirlwind of passion. The contagion of the crime, which he denounces, has marred his whole nature. He no longer sees anything in the world but corruption and lying. To vilify the virtuous were little; he vilifies virtue herself. Inanimate things are sucked into the whirl of grief. The sky's red tint at sunset, the pallid shade spread by night over the landscape, become the blush and the pallor of shame, and the wretched man who speaks and weeps sees the whole world totter with him in the dimness of despair.

Hamlet, it will be said, is half-mad; this explains his vehemence of expression. The truth is that Hamlet, here, is Shakspeare. Be the situation terrible or peaceful, whether he is engaged on an invective or

[1] Act iii. Sc. 4.

[2] *Ibid.*

a conversation, the style is excessive throughout. Shakspeare never sees things tranquilly. All the powers of his mind are concentrated in the present image or idea. He is buried and absorbed in it. With such a genius, we are on the brink of an abyss; the eddying water dashes in headlong, devouring whatever objects it meets, bringing them to light again, if at all, transformed and mutilated. We pause stupefied before these convulsive metaphors, which might have been written by a fevered hand in a night's delirium, which gather a pageful of ideas and pictures in half a sentence, which scorch the eyes they would enlighten. Words lose their sense; constructions are put out of joint; paradoxes of style, apparently false expressions, which a man might occasionally venture upon with diffidence in the transport of his rapture, become the ordinary language; he dazzles, he repels, he terrifies, he disgusts, he oppresses; his verses are a piercing and sublime song, pitched in too high a key, above the reach of our organs, which offends our ears, of which our mind alone can divine the justice and beauty.

Yet this is little; for that singular force of concentration is redoubled by the suddenness of the dash which it displays. In Shakspeare there is no preparation, no adaptation, no development, no care to make himself understood. Like a too fiery and powerful horse, he bounds, but cannot run. He bridges in a couple of words an enormous interval; is at the two poles in a single instant. The reader vainly looks for the intermediate track; confounded by these prodigious leaps, he wonders by what miracle the poet has entered upon a new idea the very moment when he quitted the last, seeing perhaps between the two images a long scale of transitions, which we pace painfully step by step, but which he has spanned in a stride. Shakspeare flies, we creep. Hence comes a style made up of conceits, bold images shattered in an instant by others still bolder, barely indicated ideas completed by others far removed, no visible connexion, but a visible incoherence; at every step we halt, the track failing; and there, far above us, lo, stands the poet, and we find that we have ventured in his footsteps, through a craggy land, full of precipices, which he threads, as if it were a straightforward road, but on which our greatest efforts barely carry us along.

What will you think, further, if we observe that these vehement expressions, so unexpected, instead of following one after the other, slowly and with effort, are hurled out by hundreds, with an impetuous ease and abundance, like the bubbling waves from a welling spring, which are heaped together, rise one above another, and find no place wide enough to spread themselves and fall? You may find in *Romeo and Juliet* a score of examples of this inexhaustible inspiration. The two lovers pile up an infinite mass of metaphors, impassioned exaggerations, clenches, contorted phrases, amorous extravagances. Their language is like the trill of nightingales. Shakspeare's wits, Mercutio, Beatrice, Rosalind, his clowns, buffoons, sparkle with far-fetched jokes, which

rattle out like a musketry-fire. There is none of them but provides enough play of words to stock a whole theatre. Lear's curses, or Queen Margaret's, would suffice for all the madmen in an asylum, or all the oppressed of the earth. The sonnets are a delirium of ideas and images, turned out with an energy enough to make a man giddy. His first poem, *Venus and Adonis*, is the sensual ecstasy of a Correggio, insatiable and excited. This exuberant fecundity intensifies qualities already in excess, and multiplies a hundred-fold the luxuriance of metaphor, the incoherence of style, and the unbridled vehemence of expression.[1]

All that I have said may be compressed into a few words. Objects were taken into his mind organised and complete; they pass into ours disjointed, decomposed, fragmentarily. He thought in the lump, we think piecemeal; hence his style and our style—two languages not to be reconciled. We, for our part, writers and reasoners, can note precisely by a word each isolated fraction of an idea, and represent the due order of its parts by the due order of our expressions. We advance gradually; we affiliate, go down to the roots, try and treat our words as numbers, our sentences as equations; we employ but general terms, which every mind can understand, and regular constructions, into which any mind can enter; we attain justness and clearness, not life. Shakspeare lets justness and clearness look out for themselves, and attains life. From amidst his complex conception and his coloured semi-vision he grasps a fragment, a quivering fibre, and shows it; it is for you, from this fragment, to divine the rest. He, behind the word, has a whole picture, an attitude, a long argument abridged, a mass of swarming ideas; you know them, these abbreviative, condensive words: these are they which we launch out from the furnace of invention, in a fit of passion—words of slang or of fashion, which appeal to local memory or individual experience;[2] little concocted and incorrect phrases, which, by their irregularity, express the suddenness and the breaks of the inner sensation; trivial words, exaggerated figures.[3] There is a gesture beneath each, a quick contraction of the brows, a curl of laughing lips, a clown's trick, an unhinging of the whole machine. None of them mark ideas; each is the extremity and issue of a complete mimic action; none is the expression and definition of a partial and limited idea. This is why Shakspeare is strange and powerful, obscure and original, beyond all the poets of his or any other age; the most immoderate of all violators of language, the most marvellous of all creators of souls,

[1] This is why, in the eyes of a writer of the seventeenth century, Shakspeare's style is the most obscure, pretentious, painful, barbarous, and absurd, that could be imagined.

[2] Shakspeare's vocabulary is the most copious of all. It comprises about 15,000 words; Milton's only 8000.

[3] See the conversation of Laertes and his sister, and of Laertes and Polonius, in *Hamlet*. The style is foreign to the situation; and we see here plainly the natural and necessary process of Shakspeare's thought.

the farthest removed from regular logic and classical reason, the one most capable of exciting in us a world of forms, and of placing living beings before us.

III.

Let us reconstruct this world, so as to find in it the imprint of its creator. A poet does not copy at random the manners which surround him; he selects from this vast material, and involuntarily brings upon the stage the moods of the heart and the conduct which best suit his talent. If he is a logician, a moralist, an orator, as, for instance, one of the French great tragic poets (Racine) of the seventeenth century, he will only represent noble manners; he will avoid low characters; he will have a horror of valets and the plebs; he will observe the greatest decorum in respect of the strongest outbreaks of passion; he will reject as scandalous every low or indecent word; he will give us reason, loftiness, good taste throughout; he will suppress the familiarity, childishness, artlessness, gay banter of domestic life; he will blot out precise details, special traits, and will raise tragedy into a serene and sublime region, where his abstract personages, unencumbered by time and space, after an exchange of eloquent harangues and able dissertations, will kill each other becomingly, and as though they were merely concluding a ceremony. Shakspeare does just the contrary, because his genius is the exact opposite. His master faculty is an impassioned imagination, freed from the fetters of reason and morality. He abandons himself to it, and finds in man nothing that he would care to lop off. He accepts nature, and finds it beautiful in its entirety. He paints it in its littlenesses, its deformities, its weaknesses, its excesses, its irregularities, and in its rages; he exhibits man at his meals, in bed, at play, drunk, mad, sick; he adds that which passes behind the stage to that which passes on the stage. He does not dream of ennobling, but of copying human life, and aspires only to make his copy more energetic and more striking than the original.

Hence the morals of this drama; and first, the want of dignity. Dignity arises from self-command. A man selects the most noble of his acts and attitudes, and allows himself no other. Shakspeare's characters select none, but allow themselves all. His kings are men, and fathers of families. The terrible Leontes, who is about to order the death of his wife and his friend, plays like a child with his son: caresses him, gives him all the pretty little pet names which mothers are wont to employ; he dares be trivial; he gabbles like a nurse; he has her language, and fulfils her offices:

> 'Leontes. What, hast smutch'd thy nose?
> They say it is a copy out of mine. Come, captain,
> We must be neat; not neat, but cleanly, captain: . . .
> Come, sir page,
> Look on me with your welkin eye: sweet villain!

Most dear'st! my collop . . . Looking on the lines
Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil
Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreech'd,
In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled,
Lest it should bite its master. . . .
How like, methought, I then was to this kernel,
This squash, this gentleman! . . . My brother,
Are you so fond of your young prince as we
Do seem to be of ours?
Polixenes. If at home, sir,
He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter,
Now my sworn friend and then mine enemy,
My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all:
He makes a July's day short as December,
And with his varying childness cures in me
Thoughts that would thick my blood.' [1]

There are a score of such passages in Shakspeare. The great passions, with him as in nature, are preceded or followed by trivial actions, scraps of talk, commonplace sentiments. Strong emotions are accidents in our life: to drink, to eat, to talk of indifferent things, to carry out mechanically an habitual duty, to dream of some stale pleasure or some ordinary annoyance, that is the business of our lives. Shakspeare paints us as we are; his heroes bow, ask people for news, speak of rain and fine weather, as often and as casually as ourselves, on the very eve of falling into the extremity of misery, or of plunging into fatal resolutions. Hamlet asks what's o'clock, finds the wind biting, talks of feasts and music heard without; and this quiet talk, so little in harmony with action, so full of slight, insignificant facts, which chance alone has raised up, lasts until the moment when his father's ghost, rising in the darkness, reveals the assassination which it is his duty to avenge.

Reason tells us that our manners should be measured; this is why the manners which Shakspeare paints are not so. Pure nature is violent, passionate; she admits no excuses, suffers no moderation, takes no count of circumstances, wills blindly, breaks out into railing, has the irrationality, ardour, anger of children. Shakspeare's characters have hot blood and a ready hand. They cannot restrain themselves, they abandon themselves at once to their grief, indignation, love, and plunge fatally down the steep slope, where their passion urges them. How many need I quote? Timon, Leonato, Cressida, all the young girls, all the chief characters in the great dramas; everywhere Shakspeare paints the unreflecting impetuosity of immediate action. Capulet tells his daughter Juliet that in three days she is to marry Earl Paris, and bids her be proud of it; she answers that she is not proud of it, and yet she thanks the earl for this proof of love. Compare Capulet's fury with the

[1] *Winter's Tale*, i. 2.

anger of Orgon,[1] and you may measure the difference of the two poets and the two civilisations:

'*Capulet.* How now, how now, chop-logic! What is this?
"Proud," and "I thank you," and "I thank you not;"
And yet "not proud," mistress minion, you,
Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,
But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next,
To go with Paris to Saint Peter's church,
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.
Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage!
You tallow-face!
Juliet. Good father, I beseech you on my knees,
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.
C. Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face:
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me;
My fingers itch. . . .
Lady C. You are too hot.
C. God's bread! it makes me mad:
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man;
And then to have a wretched puling fool,
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,
To answer, "I'll not wed; I cannot love,
I am too young; I pray you, pardon me,"—
But, an you will not wed, I'll pardon you:
Graze where you will, you shall not house with me:
Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee.'[2]

This method of exhorting one's child to marry is peculiar to Shakspeare and the sixteenth century. Contradiction to these men was like a red rag to a bull: it drove them mad.

We might be sure that in this age, and on this stage, decency was a thing unknown. It is wearisome, being a check; men got rid of it, because it was wearisome. It is a gift of reason and morality; as indecency is produced by nature and passion. Shakspeare's words are too indecent to be translated. His characters call things by their dirty

[1] One of Molière's characters in *Tartuffe*.—TR.

[2] *Romeo and Juliet*, iii. 5.

names, and compel the thoughts to particular images of physical love. The talk of gentlemen and ladies is full of coarse allusions; we should have to find out an alehouse of the lowest description to hear the like words nowadays.[1]

It would be in an alehouse too that we should have to look for the rude jests and brutal kind of wit which form the staple of these conversations. Kindly politeness is the slow fruit of an advanced reflection; it is a sort of humanity and kindliness applied to small acts and every-day discourse; it bids man soften towards others, and forget himself in others; it constrains simple nature, which is selfish and gross. This is why it is absent from the manners of the drama we are considering. You will see carmen, out of sportiveness and good humour, deal one another hard blows: so it is pretty well with the conversation of the lords and ladies who are in a sportive mood; for instance, Beatrice and Benedick, very well bred folk as things go,[2] with a great name for wit and politeness, whose smart retorts create amusement for the bystanders. These 'skirmishes of wit' consist in telling one another plainly: You are a coward, a glutton, an idiot, a buffoon, a rake, a brute! You are a parrot's tongue, a fool, a . . . (the word is there). Benedick says:

> 'I will go . . . to the Antipodes . . . rather than hold three words' conference with this harpy. . . . I cannot endure my Lady Tongue. . . .
> *Don Pedro.* You have put him down, lady, you have put him down.
> *Beatrice.* So I would not he should do me, my lord, lest I should prove the mother of fools.'[3]

We can infer the tone they use when in anger. Emilia, in *Othello*, says:

> 'He call'd her whore; a beggar in his drink
> Could not have laid such terms upon his callat.'[4]

They have a vocabulary of foul words as complete as that of Rabelais, and they drain it dry. They catch up handfuls of mud, and hurl it at their enemy, not conceiving themselves to be smirched.

Their actions correspond. They go without shame or pity to the limits of their passion. They kill, poison, violate, burn; the stage is full of abominations. Shakspeare lugs upon the stage all the atrocious deeds of the civil wars. These are the ways of wolves and hyænas. We must read of Jack Cade's sedition to gain an idea of this madness and fury. We might imagine we were seeing infuriated beasts, the murderous recklessness of a wolf in a sheepfold, the brutality of a hog fouling and rolling himself in filth and blood. They ruin, kill, butcher each other; with their feet in the blood of their victims, they call for food and

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[1] *Henry VIII.* ii. 3, etc.

[2] *Much Ado about Nothing.* See also the manner in which Henry v. pays court to Katharine of France (v. 2).

[3] *Much Ado about Nothing,* ii. 1.

[4] Act iv. 2.

drink; they stick heads on pikes and make them kiss one another, and they laugh.

'*Jack Cade.* There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny. . . . There shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all in one livery. . . . And here, sitting upon London-stone, I charge and command that, of the city's cost, the pissing-conduit run nothing but claret wine this first year of our reign. . . . Away, burn all the records of the realm: my mouth shall be the parliament of England. . . . And henceforth all things shall be in common. . . . What canst thou answer to my majesty for giving up of Normandy unto Mounsieur Basimecu, the dauphin of France? . . . The proudest peer in the realm shall not wear a head on his shoulders, unless he pay me tribute; there shall not a maid be married, but she shall pay to me her maidenhead ere they have it. (*Re-enter rebels with the heads of Lord Say and his son-in-law.*) But is not this braver? Let them kiss one another, for they loved well when they were alive.'[1]

Man must not be let loose; we know not what lusts and furies may brood under a sober guise. Nature was never so hideous, and this hideousness is the truth.

Are these cannibal moods only met with among the scum? Why, the princes are worse. The Duke of Cornwall orders the old Earl of Gloucester to be tied to a chair, because, owing to him, King Lear has escaped:

'Fellows, hold the chair.
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.
(*Gloucester is held down in the chair, while Cornwall plucks out one of his eyes, and sets his foot on it.*)
Gloster. He that will think to live till he be old,
Give me some help! O cruel! O you gods!
Regan. One side will mock another; the other too.
Cornwall. If you see vengeance,—
Servant. Hold your hand, my lord:
I have served you ever since I was a child;
But better service have I never done you,
Than now to bid you hold. *Reg.* How now, you dog!
Serv. If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'd shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean?
Corn. My villain! (*Draws, and runs at him.*)
Serv. Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.
(*Draws; they fight; Cornwall is wounded.*)
Regan. Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus!
(*Snatches a sword, comes behind, and stabs him.*)
Serv. O, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left
To see some mischief on him. O! (*Dies.*)
Corn. Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly!
Where is thy lustre now?
Gloster. All dark and comfortless. Where's my son? . . .
Regan. Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover.'[2]

[1] *Henry VI.* 2d part, iv. 2, 6, 7.

[2] *King Lear*, iii. 7.

Such are the manners of that stage. They are unbridled, like those of the age, and like the poet's imagination. To copy the common actions of every-day life, the puerilities and feeblenesses to which the greatest continually sink, the transports which degrade them, the indecent, harsh, or foul words, the atrocious deeds in which licence revels, the brutality and ferocity of primitive nature, is the work of a free and unencumbered imagination. To copy this hideousness and these excesses with a selection of such familiar, significant, precise details, that they reveal under every word of every personage the complete condition of civilisation, is the work of a concentrated and all-powerful imagination. This species of manners and this energy of description indicate the same faculty, unique and excessive, which the style had already indicated.

IV.

On this common background stands out a population of distinct living figures, illuminated by an intense light, in striking relief. This creative power is Shakspeare's great gift, and it communicates an extraordinary significance to his words. Every word pronounced by one of his characters enables us to see, besides the idea which it contains and the emotion which prompted it, the aggregate of the qualities and the entire character which produced it—the mood, physical attitude, bearing, look of the man, all instantaneously, with a clearness and force approached by no one. The words which strike our ears are not the thousandth part of those we hear within; they are like sparks thrown off at intervals; the eyes catch rare flashes of flame; the mind alone perceives the vast conflagration of which they are the signs and the effect. He gives us two dramas in one: the first strange, convulsive, curtailed, visible; the other consistent, immense, invisible: the one covers the other so well, that as a rule we do not realise that we are perusing words: we hear the roll of those terrible voices, we see contracted features, glowing eyes, pallid faces; we see the rages, the furious resolutions which mount to the brain with the feverish blood, and descend to the sharp-strung nerves. This property possessed by every phrase to exhibit a world of sentiments and forms, comes from the fact that the phrase is actually caused by a world of emotions and images. Shakspeare, when he wrote, felt all that we feel, and much besides. He had the prodigious faculty of seeing in a twinkling of the eye a complete character, body, mind, past and present, in every detail and every depth of his being, with the exact attitude and the expression of face, which the situation demanded. A word here and there of Hamlet or Othello would need for its explanation three pages of commentaries; each of the half-understood thoughts, which the commentator may have discovered, has left its trace in the turn of the phrase, in the nature of the metaphor, in the order of the words; nowadays, in pursuing these traces, we divine the thoughts. These innumerable

traces have been impressed in a second, within the compass of a line. In the next line there are as many, impressed just as quickly, and in the same compass. You can gauge the concentration and the velocity of the imagination which creates thus.

These characters are all of the same family. Good or bad, gross or delicate, refined or awkward, Shakspeare gives them all the same kind of spirit which is his own. He has made of them imaginative people, void of will and reason, impassioned machines, vehemently hurled one upon another, who were the representation of whatever is most natural and most abandoned in human nature. Let us act the play to ourselves, and see in all its stages this clanship of figures, this prominence of portraits.

Lowest of all are the stupid folk, babbling or brutish. Imagination already exists there, where reason is not yet born; it exists also here, where reason is dead. The idiot and the brute blindly follow the phantoms which exist in their benumbed or mechanical brains. No poet has understood this mechanism like Shakspeare. His Caliban, for instance, a deformed savage, fed on roots, growls like a beast under the hand of Prospero, who has subdued him. He howls continually against his master, though he knows that every curse will be paid back with 'cramps and aches.' He is a chained wolf, trembling and fierce, who tries to bite when approached, and who crouches when he sees the lash raised above him. He has a foul sensuality, a loud base laugh, the gluttony of degraded humanity. He wished to violate Miranda in her sleep. He cries for his food, and gorges himself when he gets it. A sailor who had landed in the island, Stephano, gives him wine; he kisses his feet, and takes him for a god; he asks if he has not dropped from heaven, and adores him. We find in him rebellious and baffled passions, which are eager to be avenged and satiated. Stephano had beaten his comrade. Caliban cries, 'Beat him enough: after a little time I'll beat him too.' He prays Stephano to come with him and murder Prospero in his sleep; he thirsts to lead him there, and sees his master already with his throat cut, and his brains scattered on the earth:

> 'Prithee, my king, be quiet. See'st thou here,
> This is the mouth o' the cell: no noise, and enter.
> Do that good mischief which may make this island
> Thine own for ever, and I, thy Caliban,
> For aye thy foot-licker.' [1]

Others, like Ajax and Cloten, are more like men, and yet it is pure mood that Shakspeare depicts in them, as in Caliban. The clogging corporeal machine, the mass of muscles, the thick blood coursing in the veins of these fighting brutes, oppress the intelligence, and leave no life but for animal passions. Ajax uses his fists, and devours meat; that is

[1] *The Tempest*, iv. 1.

his existence; if he is jealous of Achilles, it is pretty much as a bull is jealous of his fellow. He permits himself to be restrained and led by Ulysses, without looking before him: the grossest flattery decoys him. The Greeks have urged him to accept Hector's challenge. Behold him puffed up with pride, scorning to answer any one, not knowing what he says or does. Thersites cries, 'Good-morrow, Ajax;' and he replies, 'Thanks, Agamemnon.' He has no further thought than to contemplate his enormous frame, and roll majestically his great stupid eyes. When the day comes, he strikes at Hector as on an anvil. After a good while they are separated. 'I am not warm yet,' says Ajax, 'let us fight again.'[1] Cloten is less massive than this phlegmatic ox; but he is just as idiotic, just as vainglorious, just as coarse. The beautiful Imogen, urged by his insults and his scullion manners, tells him that his whole body is not worth as much as Posthumus' garment. He is stung to the quick, repeats the word ten times; he cannot shake off the idea, and runs at it again and again with his head down, like an angry ram:

'*Cloten.* "His garment?" Now, the devil— *Imogen.* To Dorothy my woman hie thee presently— *C.* "His garment?" . . . You have abused me: "His meanest garment!" . . . I'll be revenged: "His meanest garment!" Well.'[2]

He gets some of Posthumus' garments, and goes to Milford Haven, expecting to meet Imogen there. On his way he mutters thus:

'With that suit upon my back, will I ravish her: first kill him, and in her eyes; there shall she see my valour, which will then be a torment to her contempt. He on the ground, my speech of insultment ended on his dead body, and when my lust has dined,—which, as I say, to vex her I will execute in the clothes that she so praised,—to the court I'll knock her back, foot her home again.'[3]

Others, again, are but babblers: for example, Polonius, the grave brainless counsellor; a great baby, not yet out of his 'swathing clouts;' a solemn booby, who rains on men a shower of counsels, compliments, and maxims; a sort of court speaking-trumpet, useful in grand ceremonies, with the air of a thinker, but fit only to spout words. But the most complete of all these characters is that of the nurse in Romeo and Juliet, a gossip, loose in her talk, a regular kitchen-oracle, smelling of the stew-pan and old boots, foolish, impudent, immoral, but otherwise a good creature, and affectionate to her child. Mark this disjointed and never-ending gossip's babble:

'*Nurse.* 'Faith I can tell her age unto an hour.
Lady Capulet. She's not fourteen. . . .
Nurse. Come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen.
Susan and she—God rest all Christian souls!—
Were of an age: well, Susan is with God;

[1] See *Troilus and Cressida*, ii. 3, the jesting manner in which the generals drive on this fierce brute.

[2] *Cymbeline*, ii. 3.

[3] *Ibid.* iii. 5.

She was too good for me: but, as I said,
On Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen;
That shall she, marry; I remember it well.
'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years;
And she was wean'd,—I never shall forget it,—
Of all the days of the year, upon that day:
For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
Sitting in the sun under the dove-house wall;
My lord and you were then at Mantua:—
Nay, I do bear a brain:—but, as I said,
When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
To see it tetchy and fall out with the dug!
Shake, quoth the dove-house: 'twas no need, I trow,
To bid me trudge:
And since that time it is eleven years;
For then she could stand alone; nay, by the rood,
She could have run and waddled all about;
For even the day before, she broke her brow.'[1]

Then she tells an indecent anecdote, which she begins over again four times. She is silenced: what then? She has her anecdote in her head, and cannot cease repeating it and laughing to herself. Endless repetitions are the mind's first step. The vulgar do not pursue the straight line of reasoning and of the story; they repeat their steps, as it were merely marking time: struck with an image, they keep it for an hour before their eyes, and are never tired of it. If they do advance, they turn aside to a hundred chance ideas before they get at the phrase required. They let themselves be diverted by all the thoughts which come across them. This is what the nurse does; and when she brings Juliet news of her lover, she torments and wearies her, less from a wish to tease than from a habit of wandering from the point:

'*Nurse.* Jesu, what haste? can you not stay awhile?
Do you not see that I am out of breath?
Juliet. How art thou out of breath, when thou hast breath
To say to me that thou art out of breath? . . .
Is thy news good, or bad? answer to that;
Say either, and I'll stay the circumstance:
Let me be satisfied: is't good or bad?
N. Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man: Romeo! no, not he; though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand, and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare: he is not the flower of courtesy, but, I'll warrant him, as gentle as a lamb. Go thy ways, wench; serve God. What, have you dined at home?
J. No, no: but all this did I know before.
What says he of our marriage? what of that?

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, i. 3.

N. Lord, how my head aches! what a head have I!
It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces.
My back o' t'other side,—O, my back, my back!
Beshrew your heart for sending me about,
To catch my death with jaunting up and down!
J. I' faith, I am sorry that thou art not well.
Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love?
N. Your love says, like an honest gentleman, and a courteous, and a kind, and a handsome, and, I warrant, a virtuous,—Where is your mother?'[1]

It is never-ending. Her gabble is worse when she comes to announce to Juliet the death of her cousin and the banishment of Romeo. It is the shrill cry and chatter of an overgrown asthmatic magpie. She laments, confuses the names, spins roundabout sentences, ends by asking for *aqua-vitæ*. She curses Romeo, them brings him to Juliet's chamber. Next day Juliet is ordered to marry Earl Paris; Juliet throws herself into her nurse's arms, praying for comfort, advice, assistance. The other finds the true remedy: Marry Paris,

'O, he's a lovely gentleman!
Romeo's a dishclout to him: an eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
I think you are happy in this second match,
For it excels your first.'[2]

This cool immorality, these weather-cock arguments, this fashion of estimating love like a fishwoman, completes the portrait.

V.

The mechanical imagination produces Shakspeare's fool-characters: a quick venturesome dazzling, unquiet imagination, produces his men of wit. Of wit there are many kinds. One, altogether French, which is but reason, a foe to paradox, scorner of folly, a sort of incisive common sense, having no occupation but to render truth amusing and evident, the most effective weapon with an intelligent and vain people: such was the wit of Voltaire and the drawing-rooms. The other, that of improvisators and artists, is a mere inventive transport, paradoxical, unshackled, exuberant, a sort of self-entertainment, a phantasmagoria of images, quibbles, strange ideas, dazing and intoxicating, like the movement and illumination of a ball. Such is the wit of Mercutio, of the clowns, of Beatrice, Rosalind, and Benedick. They laugh, not from a sense of the ridiculous, but from the desire to laugh. You must look elsewhere for the campaigns which aggressive reason makes against human folly. Here folly is in its full bloom. Our folk think of amusement, and nothing more. They are good-humoured; they let their wit ride gaily over the possible and the impossible. They play

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, ii. 5.

[2] *Ibid.* iii. 5.

upon words, contort their sense, draw absurd and laughable inferences, exchange them alternately, like shuttlecocks, one after another, and vie with each other in singularity and invention. They dress all their ideas in strange or sparkling metaphors. The taste of the time was for masquerades; their conversation is a masquerade of ideas. They say nothing in a simple style; they only seek to heap together subtle things, far-fetched, difficult to invent and to understand; all their expressions are over-refined, unexpected, extraordinary; they strain their thought, and change it into a caricature. 'Alas, poor Romeo!' says Mercutio, 'he is already dead; stabbed with a white wench's black eye; shot through the ear with a love-song, the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft.'[1] Benedick relates a conversation he has just held with his mistress: 'O, she misused me past the endurance of a block! an oak, but with one green leaf on it would have answered her; my very visor began to assume life, and scold with her.'[2] These gay and perpetual extravagances show the bearing of the interlocutors. They do not remain quietly seated in their chairs, like the Marquis in the *Misanthrope;* they wheel about, leap, paint their faces, gesticulate boldly their ideas; their wit-rockets end with a song. Young folk, soldiers and artists, they let off their fireworks of phrases, and gambol round about. 'There was a star danced, and under that was I born.'[3] This expression of Beatrice's aptly describes the kind of poetical, sparkling, unreasoning, charming wit, more akin to music than to literature, a sort of outspoken and wide-awake dream, not unlike that described by Mercutio:

'O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
She is the fairies' midwife; and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the fore-finger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep;
Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs,
The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,
The traces of the smallest spider's web,
The collars of the moonshine's watery beams,
Her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film,
Her waggoner a small grey-coated gnat,
Not half so big as a round little worm
Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid;
Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,
Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers.
And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight,
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees,

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, ii. 4. [2] *Much Ado about Nothing*, ii. 1. [3] *Ibid.*

O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream. . . .
Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a parson's nose as a' lies asleep,
Then dreams he of another benefice:
Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
Of healths five-fathom deep; and then anon
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
And being thus frighted swears a prayer or two
And sleeps again. This is that very Mab
That plats the manes of horses in the night,
And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes. . . .
This is she'[1] . . .

Romeo interrupts him, or he would never end. Let the reader compare with the dialogue of the French theatre this little poem,

'Child of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,'[2]

introduced without incongruity into a conversation of the sixteenth century, and he will comprehend the difference between the wit which devotes itself to reasoning, or to record a subject for laughter, and that imagination which is self-amused with its own act.

Falstaff has the passions of an animal, and the imagination of a man of wit. There is no character which better exemplifies the dash and immorality of Shakspeare. Falstaff is a great supporter of disreputable places, swearer, gamester, brawler, wine-bag, as low as he well can be. He has a big belly, bloodshot eyes, bloated face, shaking leg; he spends his life huddled up among the tavern-jugs, or asleep on the ground behind the arras; he only wakes to curse, lie, brag, and steal. He is as big a swindler as Panurge, who had sixty-three ways of making money, 'of which the honestest was by sly theft.' And what is worse, he is an old man, a knight, a courtier, and well bred. Must he not be odious and repulsive? By no means; you cannot help liking him. At bottom, like his brother Panurge, he is 'the best fellow in the world.' He has no malice in his composition; no other wish than to laugh and be amused. When insulted, he bawls out louder than his attackers, and pays them back with interest in coarse words and insults; but he owes them no grudge for it. The next minute he is sitting down with them in a tavern, drinking their health like a brother and comrade. If he has vices, he exposes them so frankly that we are obliged to forgive him them. He seems to say to us: 'Well, so I am, what then? I like drinking: isn't the wine

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, i. 4. [2] *Ibid.*

good? I take to my heels when hard hitting begins: isn't fighting a nuisance? I get into debt, and do fools out of their money: isn't it nice to have money in your pocket? I brag: isn't it natural to want to be well thought of?'—'Dost thou hear, Hal? thou knowest, in the state of innocency, Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villany? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty.'[1] Falstaff is so frankly immoral, that he ceases to be so. Conscience ends at a certain point; nature assumes its place, and the man rushes upon what he desires, without more thought of being just or unjust than an animal in the neighbouring wood. Falstaff, engaged in recruiting, has sold exemptions to all the rich people, and only enrolled starved and half-naked wretches. There's but a shirt and a half in all his company: that does not trouble him. Bah! 'they'll find linen enough on every hedge.' The prince, who has seen them pass muster, says, 'I did never see such pitiful rascals.' 'Tut, tut,' answers Falstaff, 'good enough to toss; food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better; tush, man, mortal men, mortal men.'[2] His second excuse is his unfailing spirit. If ever there was a man who could talk, it is he. Insults and oaths, curses, jobations, protests, flow from him as from an open barrel. He is never at a loss; he devises a shift for every difficulty. Lies sprout out of him, fructify, increase, beget one another, like mushrooms on a rich and rotten bed of earth. He lies still more from his imagination and nature than from interest and necessity. It is evident from the manner in which he strains his fictions. He says he has fought alone against two men. The next moment it is four. Presently we have seven, then eleven, then fourteen. He is stopped in time, or he would soon be talking of a whole army. When unmasked, he does not lose his temper, and is the first to laugh at his boastings. 'Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold. . . . What, shall we be merry? shall we have a play extempore?'[3] He does the scolding part of King Henry with so much truth, that one might take him for a king, or an actor. This big pot-bellied fellow, a coward, a jester, a brawler, a drunkard, a lewd rascal, a pothouse poet, is one of Shakspeare's favourites. The reason is, that his manners are those of pure nature, and Shakspeare's mind is congenial with his own.

VI.

Nature is shameless and gross amidst this mass of flesh, heavy with wine and fatness. It is delicate in the delicate body of women, but as unreasoning and impassioned in Desdemona as in Falstaff. Shakspeare's women are charming children, who feel in excess and love with folly. They have unconstrained manners, little rages, pretty words of friendship, coquettish rebelliousness, a graceful volubility, which

[1] First Part of *King Henry IV.*, iii. 3. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 2. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 4.

recall the warbling and the prettiness of birds. The heroines of the French stage are almost men; these are women, and in every sense of the word. More imprudent than Desdemona a woman could not be. She is moved with pity for Cassio, and asks a favour for him passionately, recklessly, be the thing just or no, dangerous or no. She knows nothing of man's laws, and thinks nothing of them. All that she sees is, that Cassio is unhappy:

> 'Be thou assured, good Cassio . . . My lord shall never rest;
> I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;
> His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift;
> I'll intermingle everything he does
> With Cassio's suit.'[1]

She asks her favour:

> 'Othello. Not now, sweet Desdemona; some other time.
> Des. But shall 't be shortly? O. The sooner, sweet, for you.
> Des. Shall 't be to-night at supper? O. No, not to-night.
> Des. To-morrow dinner, then? O. I shall not dine at home;
> I meet the captains at the citadel.
> Des. Why, then, to-morrow night; or Tuesday morn;
> On Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn:
> I prithee, name the time, but let it not
> Exceed three days: in faith, he's penitent.'[2]

She is somewhat astonished to see herself refused; she scolds him. Othello yields: who would not yield, seeing the reproach in those lovely sulking eyes? O, says she, with a pretty pout:

> 'This is not a boon;
> 'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
> Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,
> Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
> To your own person.'[3]

A moment after, when he prays her to leave him alone for a while, mark the innocent gaiety, the ready observance, the playful child's tone:

> 'Shall I deny you? no: farewell, my lord. . . .
> Emilia, come: Be as your fancies teach you;
> Whate'er you be, I am obedient.'[4]

This vivacity, this petulance, does not prevent shrinking modesty and silent timidity: on the contrary, they spring from a common cause, extreme sensibility. She, who feels much and deeply, has more reserve and more passion than others; she breaks out or is silent; she says nothing or everything. Such is this Imogen,

> 'So tender of rebukes that words are strokes,
> And strokes death to her.'[5]

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1 *Othello*, iii. 3.
2 *Ibid.*
3 *Ibid.*
4 *Ibid.*
5 *Cymbeline*, iii. 5.

Such is Virgilia, the sweet wife of Coriolanus: her heart is not a Roman one; she is terrified at her husband's victories: when Volumnia describes him stamping on the field of battle, and wiping his bloody brow with his hand, she grows pale:

> 'His bloody brow! O Jupiter, no blood! . . .
> Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius!'[1]

She would forget all that she knows of these dangers; she dare not think of them. When asked if Coriolanus does not generally return wounded, she cries, 'O, no, no, no.' She shuns this cruel idea, and nurses a secret anguish at the bottom of her heart. She will not leave the house: 'I'll not over the threshold till my lord return.'[2] She does not smile, will hardly admit a visitor; she would blame herself, as for a lack of tenderness, for a moment's forgetfulness or gaiety. When he does return, she can only blush and weep. This exalted sensibility must needs end in love. They all love without measure, and nearly all at first sight. At the first look Juliet casts on Romeo, she says to the nurse:

> 'Go, ask his name: if he be married,
> My grave is like to be my wedding bed.'[3]

It is the revelation of their destiny. As Shakspeare has made them, they cannot but love, and they must love till death. But this first look is an ecstasy; and this sudden approach of love is a transport. Miranda seeing Fernando, fancies that she sees 'a thing divine.' She halts motionless, in the amazement of this sudden vision, at the sound of these heavenly harmonies which rise from the depths of her heart. She weeps, on seeing him drag the heavy logs; with her tender white hands she would do the work whilst he reposed. Her compassion and tenderness carry her away; she is no longer mistress of her words, she says what she would not, what her father has forbidden her to disclose, what an instant before she would never have confessed. The too full heart overflows unwittingly, happy, and ashamed at the current of joy and new sensations with which an unknown feeling has flooded her:

> '*Miranda.* I am a fool to weep at what I am glad of. . . .
> *Fernando.* Wherefore weep you?
> *M.* At mine unworthiness that dare not offer
> What I desire to give, and much less take
> What I shall die to want. . . .
> I am your wife, if you will marry me;
> If not, I'll die your maid.'[4]

This irresistible invasion of love transforms the whole character. The shrinking and tender Desdemona, suddenly, in full senate, before her father, renounces her father; dreams not for an instant of asking his pardon, or consoling him. She will leave for Cyprus with Othello,

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[1] *Coriolanus*, i. 3. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Romeo and Juliet*, i. 5. [4] *The Tempest*, iii. 1.

through the enemy's fleet and the tempest. Everything vanishes before the one and adored image which has taken entire and absolute possession of her full heart. So, extreme evils, bloody resolves, are only the natural sequence of such love. Ophelia becomes mad, Juliet commits suicide; no one but looks upon such madness and death as necessary. You will not then discover virtue in these souls, for by virtue is implied a determinate desire to do good, and a rational observance of duty. They are only pure through delicacy or love. They recoil from vice as a gross thing, not as an immoral thing. What they feel is not respect for the marriage vow, but adoration of their husband. 'O sweetest, fairest lily!' So Cymbeline speaks of one of these frail and lovely flowers which cannot be torn from the tree to which they have grown, whose least impurity would tarnish their whiteness. When Imogen learns that her husband means to kill her as being faithless, she does not revolt at the outrage; she has no pride, but only love. 'False to his bed!' She faints at the thought that she is no longer loved. When Cordelia hears her father, an irritable old man, already half insane, ask her how she loves him, she cannot make up her mind to say aloud the flattering protestations which her sisters have been lavishing. She is ashamed to display her tenderness before the world, and to buy a dowry by it. He disinherits her, and drives her away; she holds her tongue. And when she afterwards finds him abandoned and mad, she goes on her knees before him, with such a touching emotion, she weeps over that dear insulted head with so gentle a pity, that you might fancy it was the tender accent of a desolate but delighted mother, kissing the pale lips of her child:

'O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abused nature!
Th' untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up
Of this child-changed father! . . .
O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made! . . . Was this a face
To be opposed against the warring winds?
. . . Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire. . . .
How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?'[1]

If, in fact, Shakspeare comes across a heroic character, worthy of Corneille, a Roman, such as the mother of Coriolanus, he will explain by passion, what Corneille would have explained by heroism. He will depict it violent and eager with the violent feelings of glory. She will not be able to refrain herself. She will break out into accents of triumph when she sees her son crowned; into imprecations of vengeance

[1] *King Lear*, iv. 7.

when she sees him banished. She will descend to the vulgarities of pride and anger; she will abandon herself to mad effusions of joy, to dreams of an ambitious fancy,[1] and will prove once more that the impassioned imagination of Shakspeare has left its trace in all the creatures whom he has made.

VII.

Nothing is easier to such a poet than to create perfect villains. Throughout he is handling the unruly passions which make their character, and he never hits upon the moral law which restrains them; but at the same time, and by the same faculty, he changes the inanimate masks, which the conventions of the stage mould on an identical pattern, into living and illusory figures. How shall a demon be made to look as real as a man? Iago is a soldier of fortune who has roved the world from Syria to England, who, nursed in the lowest ranks, having had close acquaintance with the horrors of the wars of the sixteenth century, had drawn thence the maxims of a Turk and the philosophy of a butcher; principles he has none left. 'O my reputation, my reputation!' cries the dishonoured Cassio. 'As I am an honest man,' says Iago, 'I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation.'[2] As for woman's virtue, he looks upon it like a man who has kept company with slave-dealers. He estimates Desdemona's love as he would estimate a mare's: that sort of thing lasts so long—then . . . And then he airs an experimental theory, with precise details and nasty expressions, like a stud doctor. 'It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor, nor he his to her. . . . These Moors are changeable in their wills; . . . the food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as bitter as colonquintida. She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice.'[3] Desdemona, on the shore, trying to forget her care, begs him to sing the praises of her sex. For every portrait he finds the most insulting insinuations. She insists, and bids him take the case of a really perfect woman. He replies: 'She was a wight, if ever such

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[1] 'O ye're well met: the hoarded plague o' the gods
Requite your love!
If that I could for weeping, you should hear—
Nay, and you shall hear some. . . .
I'll tell thee what; yet go:
Nay, but thou shalt stay too: I would my son
Were in Arabia, and thy tribe before him,
His good sword in his hand.'—*Coriolanus*, iv. 2.

See again, *Coriolanus*, i. 3, the frank and abandoned triumph of a woman of the people: 'I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.'

[2] *Othello*, ii. 3. [3] *Ibid.* i. 3.

wight were, . . . to suckle fools and chronicle small beer.'[1] He also says: 'O gentle lady, do not put me to't; for I am nothing, if not critical.'[2] This is the key to his character. He despises man; to him Desdemona is a little wanton wench, Cassio an elegant word-shaper, Othello a mad bull, Roderigo an ass to be basted, thumped, made to go. He diverts himself by setting these passions at issue; he laughs at it as at a play. When Othello, swooning, shakes in his convulsions, he rejoices at this capital result: 'Work on, my medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught.'[3] You would take him for one of the poisoners of the time, studying the effect of a new potion on a dying dog. He only speaks in sarcasms; he has them ready for every one, even for those whom he does not know. When he wakes Brabantio to inform him of the elopement of his daughter, he tells him the matter in coarse terms, sharpening the sting of the bitter pleasantry, like a conscientious executioner, rubbing his hands when he hears the culprit groan under the knife. 'Thou art a villain!' cries Brabantio. 'You are —a senator!' answers Iago. But the feature which really completes him, and makes him rank with Mephistopheles, is the atrocious truth and the cogent reasoning by which he likens his crime to virtue.[4] Cassio, under his advice, goes to see Desdemona, to obtain her intercession for him; this visit is to be the ruin of Desdemona and Cassio. Iago, left alone, hums for an instant quietly, then cries:

> 'And what's he then that says I play the villain?
> When this advice is free I give and honest,
> Probal to thinking and indeed the course
> To win the Moor again.'[5]

To all these features must be added a diabolical energy,[6] an inexhaustible inventiveness in images, caricatures, obscenity, the manners of a guard-room, the brutal bearing and tastes of a trooper, habits of dissimulation, coolness and hatred, patience, contracted amid the perils and devices of a military life, and the continuous miseries of long degradation and frustrated hope; you will understand how Shakspeare could transform abstract treachery into a concrete form, and how Iago's atrocious vengeance is only the natural consequence of his character, life, and training.

VIII.

How much more visible is this impassioned and unfettered genius of Shakspeare in the great characters which sustain the whole weight of the drama! The startling imagination, the furious velocity of the manifold and exuberant ideas, the unruly passion, rushing upon death

[1] *Othello*, ii. 1. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* iv. 1.

[4] See the like cynicism and scepticism in Richard III. Both begin by slandering human nature, and both are misanthropical of *malice prepense*.

[5] *Othello*, ii. 3.

[6] See his conversation with Brabantio, then with Roderigo, Act i.

and crime, hallucinations, madness, all the ravages of delirium bursting through will and reason: such are the forces and ravings which engender them. Shall I speak of dazzling Cleopatra, who holds Antony in the whirlwind of her devices and caprices, who fascinates and kills, who scatters to the winds the lives of men as a handful of desert-dust, the fatal Eastern sorceress who sports with life and death, headstrong, irresistible, child of air and fire, whose life is but a tempest, whose thought, ever repointed and broken, is like the crackling of a lightning flash? Of Othello, who, beset by the concise picture of physical adultery, cries at every word of Iago like a man on the rack; who, his nerves hardened by twenty years of war and shipwreck, grows mad and swoons for grief, and whose soul, poisoned by jealousy, is distracted and disorganised in convulsions and in stupor? Or of old King Lear, violent and weak, whose half-unseated reason is gradually toppled over under the shocks of incredible treacheries, who presents the frightful spectacle of madness, first increasing, then complete, of curses, howlings, superhuman sorrows, into which the transport of the first access of fury carries him, and then of peaceful incoherence, chattering imbecility, into which the shattered man subsides: a marvellous creation, the supreme effort of pure imagination, a disease of reason which reason could never have conceived?[1] Amid so many portraitures let us choose two or three to indicate the depth and nature of them all. The critic is lost in Shakspeare, as in an immense town; he will describe a couple of monuments, and entreat the reader to imagine the city.

Plutarch's Coriolanus is an austere, coldly haughty patrician, a general of the army. In Shakspeare's hands he becomes a coarse soldier, a man of the people as to his language and manners, an athlete of war, with a voice like a trumpet; whose eyes by contradiction are filled with a rush of blood and anger, proud and terrible in mood, a lion's soul in the body of a steer. The philosopher Plutarch told of him a lofty philosophic action, saying that he had been at pains to save his landlord in the sack of Corioli. Shakspeare's Coriolanus has indeed the same disposition, for he is really a good fellow; but when Lartius asks him the name of this poor Volscian, in order to secure his liberty, he yawns out:

> 'By Jupiter! forgot.
> I am weary; yea, my memory is tired.
> Have we no wine here?'[2]

He is hot, he has been fighting, he must drink; he leaves his Volscian in chains, and thinks no more of him. He fights like a porter, with shouts and insults, and the cries from that deep chest are

[1] See, again, in Timon, and Hotspur more particularly, a perfect example of a vehement and unreasoning imagination.

[2] *Coriolanus*, i. 9.

heard above the din of the battle like the sounds from a brazen trumpet. He has scaled the walls of Corioli, he has butchered till he is gorged with slaughter. Instantly he turns to the other army, and arrives red with blood, 'as he were flay'd.' 'Come I too late?' Cominius begins to compliment him. 'Come I too late?' he repeats. The battle is not yet finished: he embraces Cominius:

> 'O! let me clip ye
> In arms as sound as when I woo'd, in heart
> As merry as when our nuptial day was done.'[1]

For the battle is a real holiday to him. Such senses, such a frame, need the outcry, the din of battle, the excitement of death and wounds. This haughty and indomitable heart needs the joy of victory and destruction. Mark the display of his patrician arrogance and his soldier's bearing, when he is offered the tenth of the spoils:

> 'I thank you, general;
> But cannot make my heart consent to take
> A bribe to pay my sword.'[2]

The soldiers cry, Marcius! Marcius! and the trumpets sound. He gets into a passion; rates the brawlers:

> 'No more, I say! For that I have not wash'd
> My nose that bled, or foil'd some debile wretch,—
> . . . You shout me forth
> In acclamations hyperbolical;
> As if I loved my little should be dieted
> In praises sauced with lies.'[3]

They are reduced to loading him with honours: Cominius gives him a war-horse; decrees him the cognomen of Coriolanus: the people shout Caius Marcius Coriolanus! He replies:

> 'I will go wash;
> And when my face is fair, you shall perceive
> Whether I blush or no: howbeit, I thank you.
> I mean to stride your steed.'[4]

This loud voice, loud laughter, blunt acknowledgment of a man who can act and shout better than speak, foretell the mode in which he will treat the plebeians. He loads them with insults; he cannot find abuse enough for the cobblers, tailors, greedy cowards, down on their knees for a copper. 'To beg of Hob and Dick!' 'Bid them wash their faces and keep their teeth clean.' But he must do this, if he would be consul; his friends constrain him. It is then that the passionate soul, incapable of self-restraint, such as Shakspeare knew how to paint, breaks forth without let. He is there in his candidate's gown, gnashing his teeth, and getting up his lesson in this style:

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[1] *Coriolanus*, i. 6. [2] *Ibid.* i. 9. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*

'What must I say?
"I pray, sir"—Plague upon't! I cannot bring
My tongue to such a pace:—"Look, sir, my wounds!
I got them in my country's service, when
Some certain of you brethren roar'd and ran
From the noise of our own drums."'[1]

The tribunes have no difficulty in stopping the election of a candidate who begs in this fashion. They taunt him in full senate, reproach him with his speech about the corn. He repeats it, with aggravations. Once roused, neither danger nor prayer restrains him:

'His heart's his mouth:
And, being angry, 'does forget that ever
He heard the name of death.'[2]

He rails against the people, the tribunes, street-magistrates, flatterers of the plebs. 'Come, enough,' says his friend Menenius. 'Enough, with over-measure,' says Brutus the tribune. He retorts:

'No, take more:
What may be sworn by, both divine and human,
Seal what I end withal! . . . At once pluck out
The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick
The sweet which is their poison.'[3]

The tribune cries, Treason! and bids seize him. He cries:

'Hence, old goat! . . .
Hence, rotten thing! or I shall shake thy bones
Out of thy garments!'[4]

He strikes him, drives the mob off: he fancies himself amongst Volscians. 'On fair ground I could beat forty of them!' And when his friends hurry him off, he threatens still, and

'Speak(s) o' the people,
As if you (he) were a god to punish, not a man
Of their infirmity.'[5]

Yet he bends before his mother, for he has recognised in her a soul as lofty and a courage as intractable as his own. He has submitted from his infancy to the ascendency of this pride which he admires. Volumnia reminds him: 'My praises made thee first a soldier.' Without power over himself, continually tost on the fire of his too hot blood, he has always been the arm, she the thought. He obeys from involuntary respect, like a soldier before his general, but with what effort!

'*Coriolanus.* The smiles of knaves
Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up
The glances of my sight! a beggar's tongue
Make motion through my lips, and my arm'd knees,

[1] *Coriolanus*, ii. 3. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 1. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.*

Who bow'd but in my stirrup, bend like his
That hath received an alms!—I will not do't. . . .
Volumnia. . . . Do as thou list.
Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me,
But owe thy pride thyself. *Cor.* Pray, be content:
Mother, I am going to the market-place;
Chide me no more. I'll mountebank their loves,
Cog their hearts from them, and come home beloved
Of all the trades in Rome.'[1]

He goes, and his friends speak for him. Except a few bitter asides, he appears to be submissive. Then the tribunes pronounce the accusation, and summon him to answer as a traitor:

'*Cor.* How! traitor! *Men.* Nay, temperately: your promise.
Cor. The fires i' the lowest hell fold-in the people!
Call me their traitor! Thou injurious tribune!
Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths,
In thy hands clutch'd as many millions, in
Thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say,
"Thou liest," unto thee with a voice as free
As I do pray the gods.'[2]

His friends surround him, entreat him: he will not listen; he foams, he is like a wounded lion:

'Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,
Vagabond exile, flaying, pent to linger
But with a grain a day, I would not buy
Their mercy at the price of one fair word.'[3]

The people vote exile, supporting by their shouts the sentence of the tribune:

'*Cor.* You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
As reek o' the rotten fens, whose love I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you. . . . Despising,
For you, the city, thus I turn my back:
There is a world elsewhere.'[4]

Judge of his hatred by these raging words. It goes on increasing by the expectation of vengeance. We find him next with the Volscian army before Rome. His friends kneel before him, he lets them kneel. Old Menenius, who had loved him as a son, only comes now to be driven away. 'Wife, mother, child, I know not.'[5] It is himself he knows not. For this power of hating in a noble heart is equal with the power of loving. He has transports of tenderness as of hating, and can contain himself no more in joy than in grief. He runs, spite of his resolution, to his wife's arms; he bends his knee before his mother.

[1] *Coriolanus*, iii. 2. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 3. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.* v. 2.

He had summoned the Volscian chiefs to make them witnesses of his refusals; and before them, he grants all, and weeps. On his return to Corioli, an insulting word from Aufidius maddens him, and drives him upon the daggers of the Volscians. Vices and virtues, glory and misery, greatness and feebleness, the unbridled passion which composes his nature, endowed him with all.

If the life of Coriolanus is the history of a mood, that of Macbeth is the history of a monomania. The witches' prophecy was buried in his heart, instantaneously, like a fixed idea. Gradually this idea corrupts the rest, and transforms the man. He is haunted; he forgets the thanes who surround him and 'who stay upon his leisure;' he already sees in the future an indistinct chaos of images of blood:

> . . . 'Why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs? . . .
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not.'[1]

This is the language of hallucination. Macbeth's hallucination becomes complete when his wife has resolved on the assassination of the king. He sees in the air a blood-stained dagger, 'in form as palpable, as this which now I draw.' His whole brain is filled with grand and terrible phantoms, which the mind of a common murderer would never have conceived; the poetry of which indicates a generous heart, enslaved to an idea of fate, and capable of remorse:

> . . . 'Now o'er the one half world
> Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
> The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates
> Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,
> Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
> Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
> With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
> Moves like a ghost. . . . (*A bell rings.*)
> I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
> Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
> That summons thee to heaven or to hell.'[2]

He has done the deed, and returns tottering, haggard, like a drunken man. He is horrified at his bloody hands, 'these hangman's hands.' Nothing now can cleanse them. The whole ocean might sweep over them, but they would keep the hue of murder. 'What hands are here? ha, they pluck out mine eyes!' He is disturbed by a word which the sleeping chamberlains uttered:

> 'One cried, "God bless us!" and "Amen," the other;
> As they had seen me with these hangman's hands

[1] *Macbeth*, i. 3. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 1.

Listening their fear, I could not say "Amen,"
When they did say, "God bless us!"
. . . But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen?"
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.'[1]

Then comes a strange dream; a frightful vision of punishment descends upon him.

Above the beating of his heart, the tingling of the blood which boils in his brain, he had heard them cry:

'"Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep," the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.'[2]

And the voice, like an angel's trumpet, calls him by all his titles:

'Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more!'[3]

This mad idea, incessantly repeated, beats in his brain, with monotonous and hard-pressing strokes, like the tongue of a bell. Insanity begins; all the force of his mind is occupied by keeping before him, in spite of himself, the image of the man whom he has murdered in his sleep:

'To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself. (*Knock.*)
Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!'[4]

Thenceforth, in the rare intervals in which the fever of his mind is assuaged, he is like a man worn out by a long malady. It is the sad prostration of maniacs worn out by their fits of rage:

'Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had lived a blessed time; for, from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality:
All is but toys: renown and grace is dead;
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of.'[5]

When rest has restored some force to the human machine, the fixed idea shakes him again, and drives him onward, like a pitiless horseman, who has left his panting horse only for a moment, to leap again into the saddle, and spur him over precipices. The more he has done, the more he must do:

'I am in blood
Steep'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.'[6] . . .

He kills in order to preserve the fruit of his murders. The fatal circlet of gold attracts him like a magic jewel; and he beats down, from a

[1] *Macbeth*, ii. 2. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.* ii. 3. [6] *Ibid.* iii. 4.

sort of blind instinct, the heads which he sees between the crown and him:

'But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly: better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.'[1]

Macbeth has Banquo murdered, and in the midst of a great feast he is informed of the success of his plan. He smiles, and proposes Banquo's health. Suddenly, conscience-smitten, he sees the ghost of the murdered man; for this phantom, which Shakspeare summons, is not a mere stage-trick: we feel that here the supernatural is unnecessary, and that Macbeth would create it, even if hell would not send it. With stiffened muscles, dilated eyes, his mouth half open with deadly terror, he sees it shake its bloody head, and cries with that hoarse voice which is only to be heard in maniacs' cells:

'Prithee, see there! Behold! look! lo! how say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury, back our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites. . . .
Blood hath been shed ere now, i' th' olden time, . . .
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools: . . .
Avaunt! and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with!'[2]

His body trembling like that of an epileptic, his teeth clenched, foaming at the mouth, he sinks on the ground, his limbs beat against the floor, shaken with convulsive quiverings, whilst a dull sob swells his panting breast, and dies in his swollen throat. What joy can remain for a man besieged by such visions? The wide dark country, which he surveys from his towering castle, is but a field of death, haunted by deadly apparitions; Scotland, which he is depopulating, a cemetery,

[1] *Macbeth*, iii. 2.

[2] *Ibid.* iii. 4.

'Where . . . the dead man's knell
Is there scarce ask'd for who; and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying or ere they sicken.'[1]

His soul is 'full of scorpions.' He has 'supp'd full with horrors,' and the faint odour of blood has disgusted him with all else. He goes stumbling over the corpses which he has heaped up, with the mechanical and desperate smile of a maniac-murderer. Thenceforth death, life, all is one to him; the habit of murder has placed him beyond humanity. They tell him that his wife is dead:

'*Macb.* She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.'[2]

There remains for him the hardening of the heart in crime, the fixed belief in destiny. Hunted down by his enemies, 'bear-like, tied to a stake,' he fights, troubled only by the prediction of the witches, sure of being invulnerable so long as the man whom they have pointed at, does not appear. His thoughts inhabit a supernatural world, and to the last he walks with his eyes fixed on the dream, which has possessed him, from the first.

The history of Hamlet, like that of Macbeth, is the story of a moral poisoning. Hamlet's is a delicate soul, an impassioned imagination, like that of Shakspeare. He has lived hitherto, occupied in noble studies, apt in bodily and mental exercises, with a taste for art, loved by the noblest father, enamoured of the purest and most charming girl, confiding, generous, not yet having perceived, from the height of the throne to which he was born, aught but the beauty, happiness, grandeur of nature and humanity.[3] On this soul, which character and training make more sensitive than others, misfortune suddenly falls, extreme, overwhelming, of the very kind to destroy all faith and every spring of action: with one look he has seen all the vileness of humanity; and this insight is given him in his mother. His mind is yet intact; but judge from the violence of his style, the crudity of his exact details, the terrible tension of the whole nervous machine, whether he has not already one foot on the verge of madness:

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[1] *Macbeth*, iv. 3. [2] *Ibid.* v. 5. [3] Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister.*

'O that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king, . . . so loving to my mother,
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
. . . And yet, within a month,—
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman!—
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body, . . .
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue!'[1]

Here already are contortions of thought, earnests of hallucination, the symptoms of what is to come after. In the middle of a conversation the image of his father rises before his mind. He thinks he sees him. How then will it be when the 'canonised bones have burst their cerements,' 'the sepulchre hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws,' and when the ghost comes in the night, upon a high 'platform' of land, to hint to him of the tortures of his prison of fire, and to tell him of the fratricide, who has driven him thither? Hamlet grows faint, but grief strengthens him, and he has a cause for living:

'Hold, hold, my heart;
And you my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up! Remember thee!
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe.—Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, . . .
And thy commandment all alone shall live. . . .
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:
So, uncle, there you are.'[2] (*writing.*)

This convulsive outburst, this fevered writing hand, this phrensy of

[1] *Hamlet*, i. 2. [2] *Ibid.* i. 5.

intentness, prelude the approach of a monomania. When his friends come up, he treats them with the speeches of a child or an idiot. He is no longer master of his words; hollow phrases whirl in his brain, and fall from his mouth as in a dream. They call him; he answers by imitating the cry of a sportsman whistling to his falcon: 'Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come.' Whilst he is in the act of swearing them to secrecy, the ghost below repeats 'Swear.' Hamlet cries, with a nervous excitement and a fitful gaiety:

> 'Ah ha, boy! say'st thou so? art thou there, truepenny?
> Come on—you hear this fellow in the cellarage,—
> Consent to swear. . . .
> *Ghost (beneath).* Swear.
> *Ham. Hic et ubique?* then we'll shift our ground.
> Come hither, gentlemen. . . . Swear by my sword.
> *Ghost (beneath).* Swear.
> *Ham.* Well said, old mole! canst work i' the earth so fast?
> A worthy pioner!'[1]

Understand that as he says this his teeth chatter, 'pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other.' Intense anguish ends with a burst of laughter, which is nothing else than a spasm. Thenceforth Hamlet speaks as though he had a continuous nervous attack. His madness is feigned, I admit; but his mind, as a door whose hinges are twisted, swings and bangs to every wind with a mad precipitance and with a discordant noise. He has no need to search for the strange ideas, apparent incoherencies, exaggerations, the deluge of sarcasms which he accumulates. He finds them within him; he does himself no violence, he simply gives himself up to them. When he has the piece played which is to unmask his uncle, he raises himself, lounges on the floor, would lay his head in Ophelia's lap; he addresses the actors, and comments on the piece to the spectators; his nerves are strung, his excited thought is like a waving and crackling flame, and cannot find fuel enough in the multitude of objects surrounding it, upon all of which it seizes. When the king rises unmasked and troubled, Hamlet sings, and says, 'Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers—if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me—with two Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir?'[2] And he laughs terribly, for he is resolved on murder. It is clear that this state is a disease, and that the man will not survive it.

In a soul so ardent of thought, and so mighty of feeling, what is left but disgust and despair? We tinge all nature with the colour of our thoughts; we shape the world according to our own ideas; when our soul is sick, we see nothing but sickness in the universe:

> 'This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majes-

[1] *Hamlet*, i. 5.

[2] *Ibid.* iii. 2.

tical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me: no, nor woman neither.'[1]

Henceforth his thought tarnishes whatever it touches. He rails bitterly before Ophelia against marriage and love. Beauty! Innocence! Beauty is but a means of prostituting innocence:

'Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? . . . What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us.'[2]

When he has killed Polonius by accident, he hardly repents it; it is one fool less. He jeers lugubriously:

'*King.* Now Hamlet, where's Polonius?
Hamlet. At supper.
K. At supper! where?
H. Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him.'[3]

And he repeats in five or six fashions these gravedigger jests. His thoughts already inhabit a churchyard: to this hopeless philosophy your true man is a corpse. Duties, honours, passions, pleasures, projects, science, all this is but a borrowed mask, which death removes, that we may see ourselves what we are, an evil-smelling and grinning skull. It is this sight he goes to see by Ophelia's grave. He counts the skulls which the gravedigger turns out: this was a lawyer's, that a courtier's. What salutations, intrigues, pretensions, arrogance! And here now is a clown knocking it about with his spade, and playing 'at loggats with 'em.' Cæsar and Alexander have turned to clay, and make the earth fat; the masters of the world have served to 'patch a wall.' 'Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that.'[4] When one has come to this, there is nothing left but to die.

This heated imagination, which explains Hamlet's nervous disease and his moral poisoning, explains also his conduct. If he hesitates to kill his uncle, it is not from horror of blood or from our modern scruples. He belongs to the sixteenth century. On board ship he wrote the order to behead Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and to do so without giving them 'shriving-time.' He killed Polonius, he caused Ophelia's death, and has no great remorse for it. If for once he spared his uncle, it was because he found him praying, and was afraid of sending him to heaven. He thought he was killing him, when he killed Polonius. What his imagination robs him of, is the coolness and strength to go quietly and with premeditation to plunge a sword into a breast. He can

[1] *Hamlet*, ii. 2. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 1. [3] *Ibid.* iv. 3. [4] *Ibid.* v. 1.

only do the thing on a sudden suggestion; he must have a moment of enthusiasm; he must think the king is behind the arras, or else, seeing that he himself is poisoned, he must find his victim under his foil's point. He is not master of his acts; occasion dictates them; he cannot plan a murder, but must improvise it. A too lively imagination exhausts energy, by the accumulation of images and by the fury of intentness which absorbs it. You recognise in him a poet's soul, made not to act, but to dream, which is lost in contemplating the phantoms of its creation, which sees the imaginary world too clearly to play a part in the real world; an artist whom evil chance has made a prince, whom worse chance has made an avenger of crime, and who, destined by nature for genius, is condemned by fortune to madness and unhappiness. Hamlet is Shakspeare, and, at the close of this gallery of portraits which have all some features of his own, Shakspeare has painted himself in the most striking of all.

If Racine or Corneille had framed a psychology, they would have said, with Descartes: Man is an incorporeal soul, served by organs, endowed with reason and will, living in palaces or porticos, made for conversation and society, whose harmonious and ideal action is developed by discourse and replies, in a world constructed by logic beyond the realms of time and space.

If Shakspeare had framed a psychology, he would have said, with Esquirol:[1] Man is a nervous machine, governed by a mood, disposed to hallucinations, transported by unbridled passions, essentially unreasoning, a mixture of animal and poet, having no rapture but mind, no sensibility but virtue, imagination for prompter and guide, and led at random, by the most determinate and complex circumstances, to pain, crime, madness, and death.

IX.

Could such a poet always confine himself to the imitation of nature? Will this poetical world which is going on in his brain, never break loose from the laws of the world of reality? Is he not powerful enough to follow his own? He is; and the poetry of Shakspeare naturally finds an outlet in the fantastical. This is the highest grade of unreasoning and creative imagination. Despising ordinary logic, it creates therefrom another; it unites facts and ideas in a new order, apparently absurd, at bottom legitimate; it lays open the land of dreams, and its dreams deceive us like the truth.

When we enter upon Shakspeare's comedies, and even his half-dramas,[2] it is as though we met him on the threshold, like an actor to

[1] A French physician (1772–1844), celebrated for his endeavours to improve the treatment of the insane.—TR.

[2] *Twelfth Night, As you Like it, Tempest, Winter's Tale,* etc.; *Cymbeline, Merchant of Venice,* etc.

whom the prologue is committed, to prevent misunderstanding on the part of the public, and to tell them: 'Do not take too seriously what you are about to hear; I am joking. My brain, being full of fancies, desired to make plays of them, and here they are. Palaces, distant landscapes, transparent mists which blot the morning sky with their gray clouds, the red and glorious flames into which the evening sun descends, white cloisters in endless vista through the ambient air, grottos, cottages, the fantastic pageant of all human passions, the mad sport of unlooked-for chances,—this is the medley of forms, colours, sentiments, which I shuffle and mingle before me, a many-tinted skein of glistening silks, a slender arabesque, whose sinuous curves, crossing and confused, bewilder the mind by the whimsical variety of their infinite complications. Don't regard it as a picture. Don't look for a precise composition, harmonious and increasing interest, the skilful management of a well-ordered and congruous plot. I have novels and romances in my mind which I am cutting up into scenes. Never mind the *finis*, I am amusing myself on the road. It is not the end of the journey which pleases me, but the journey itself. Is there any good in going so straight and quick? Do you only care to know whether the poor merchant of Venice will escape Shylock's knife? Here are two happy lovers, seated under the palace walls on a calm night; wouldn't you like to listen to the peaceful reverie which rises like a perfume from the bottom of their hearts?

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
(*Enter musicians.*)
Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn:
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
And draw her home with music.
Jessica. I am never merry when I hear sweet music."[1]

'Have I not the right, when I see the big laughing face of a clownish servant, to stop near him, see him mouth, frolic, gossip, go through his hundred pranks and his hundred grimaces, and treat myself to the comedy of his spirit and gaiety? Two fine gentlemen pass by. I hear the rolling fire of their metaphors, and I follow their skirmish of

[1] *Merchant of Venice*, v. 1.

wit. Here in a corner is the artless arch face of a young wench. Do you forbid me to linger by her, to watch her smiles, her sudden blushes, the childish pout of her rosy lips, the coquetry of her pretty motions? You are in a great hurry if the prattle of this fresh and musical voice can't stop you. Is it no pleasure to view this succession of sentiments and figures? Is your fancy so dull, that you must have the mighty mechanism of a geometrical plot to shake it? My sixteenth century playgoers were easier to move. A sunbeam that had lost its way on an old wall, a foolish song thrown into the middle of a drama, occupied their mind as well as the blackest of catastrophes. After the horrible scene in which Shylock brandished his butcher's knife before Antonio's bare breast, they saw just as willingly the petty household wrangle, and the amusing bit of raillery which ends the piece. Like soft moving water, their soul rose and sank in an instant to the level of the poet's emotion, and their sentiments readily flowed in the bed he had prepared for them. They let him go about on his journey, and did not forbid him to make two voyages at once. They allowed several plots in one. If but the slightest thread united them, it was sufficient. Lorenzo eloped with Jessica, Shylock was frustrated in his revenge, Portia's suitors failed in the test imposed upon them; Portia, disguised as a doctor of laws, took from her husband the ring which he had promised never to part with; these three or four comedies, disunited, mingled, were shuffled and unfolded together, like an unknotted skein, in which threads of a hundred colours are entwined. Together with diversity, my spectators allowed improbability. Comedy is a slight winged creature, which flutters from dream to dream, whose wings you would break if you held it captive in the narrow prison of common sense. Do not press its fictions too hard; do not probe their contents. Let them float before your eyes like a charming swift dream. Let the fleeting apparition plunge back into the bright misty land from whence it came. For an instant it deceived you; let it suffice. It is sweet to leave the world of realities behind you; the mind can rest amidst impossibilities. We are happy when delivered from the rough chains of logic, when we wander amongst strange adventures, when we live in sheer romance, and know that we are living there. I do not try to deceive you, and make you believe in the world where I take you. One must disbelieve it in order to enjoy it. We must give ourselves up to illusion, and feel that we are giving ourselves up to it. We must smile as we listen. We smile in *The Winter's Tale*, when Hermione descends from her pedestal, and when Leontes discovers his wife in the statue, having believed her to be dead. We smile in *Cymbeline*, when we see the lone cavern in which the young princes have lived like savage hunters. Improbability deprives emotions of their sting. The events interest or touch us without making us suffer. At the very moment when sympathy is too lively, we remind ourselves that it is all a fancy. They become like distant objects, whose distance softens

their outline, and wraps them in a luminous veil of blue air. Your true comedy is an opera. We listen to sentiments without thinking too much of plot. We follow the tender or gay melodies without reflecting that they interrupt the action. We dream elsewhere on hearing music; here I bid you dream on hearing verse.'

So the prologue retires, and then the actors come on.

As you Like it is a caprice.[1] Action there is none; interest barely; likelihood still less. And the whole is charming. Two cousins, princes' daughters, come to a forest with a court clown, Celia disguised as a shepherdess, Rosalind as a boy. They find here the old duke, Rosalind's father, who, driven out of his duchy, lives with his friends like a philosopher and a hunter. They find amorous shepherds, who with songs and prayers pursue intractable shepherdesses. They discover or they meet with lovers who become their husbands. Suddenly it is announced that the wicked Duke Frederick, who had usurped the crown, has just retired to a cloister, and restored the throne to the old exiled duke. Every one gets married, every one dances, everything ends with a 'rustic revelry.' Where is the pleasantness of these puerilities? First, the fact of its being puerile; the absence of the serious permits repose. There are no events, and there is no plot. We peacefully follow the easy current of graceful or melancholy emotions, which guides and conducts us without wearying. The place adds to the illusion and charm. It is an autumn forest, in which the warm rays permeate the blushing oak leaves, or the half-stript ashes tremble and smile to the feeble breath of evening. The lovers wander by brooks that 'brawl' under antique roots. As you listen to them, you see the slim birches, whose cloak of lace grows glossy under the slant rays of the sun that gilds them, and the thoughts wander down the mossy vistas in which their footfall is lost. What better place could be chosen for the comedy of sentiment and the play of heart-fancies? Is not this a fit spot in which to listen to love-talk? Some one has seen Orlando, Rosalind's lover, in this glade; she hears it and blushes. 'Alas the day! . . . What did he, when thou sawest him? What said he? How looked he? Wherein went he? What makes he here? Did he ask for me? Where remains he? How parted he with thee? and when shalt thou see him again?' Then, with a lower voice, somewhat hesitating: 'Looks he as freshly as he did the day he wrestled?' Not yet exhausted: 'Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak. Sweet, say on.'[2] Question on question, she closes the mouth of her friend, who is ready to answer. At every word she jests, but agitated, blushing, with a forced gaiety; her bosom heaves, and her heart beats. Nevertheless she is calmer when Orlando

[1] In English, a word is wanting to express the French *fantaisie*, used by M. Taine, in describing this scene: what in music is called a *capriccio*. Tennyson calls the *Princess* a medley, but it is ambiguous.—TR.

[2] *As you Like it*, iii. 2.

comes; bandies words with him; sheltered under her disguise, she makes him confess that he loves Rosalind. Then she plagues him, like the frolic, the wag, the coquette she is. 'Why, how now, Orlando, where have you been all this while? You a lover?' Orlando repeats his love, and she pleases herself by making him repeat it more than once. She sparkles with wit, jests, mischievous pranks; pretty fits of anger, feigned sulks, bursts of laughter, deafening babble, engaging caprices. 'Come, woo me, woo me; for now I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to consent. What would you say to me now, an I were your very very Rosalind?' And every now and then she repeats with an arch smile, 'And I am your Rosalind; am I not your Rosalind?'[1] Orlando protests that he would die. Die! Who ever thought of dying for love! Leander? He took one bath too many in the Hellespont; so poets have said he died for love. Troilus? A Greek broke his head with a club; so poets have said he died for love. Come, come, Rosalind will be softer. And then she plays at marriage with him, and makes Celia pronounce the solemn words. She irritates and torments her pretended husband; tells him all the whims she means to indulge in, all the pranks she will play, all the bother he will have to endure. The retorts come one after another like fireworks. At every phrase we follow the looks of these sparkling eyes, the curves of this laughing mouth, the quick movements of this supple figure. It is a bird's petulance and volubility. 'O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love.' Then she plays with her cousin Celia, sports with her hair, calls her by every woman's name. Antitheses without end, words all a-jumble, quibbles, pretty exaggerations, word-racket; as you listen, you fancy it is the warbling of a nightingale. The trill of repeated metaphors, the melodious roll of the poetical gamut, the summer-symphony rustling under the foliage, change the piece into a veritable opera. The three lovers end by chanting a sort of trio. The first throws out a fancy, the others take it up. Four times this strophe is renewed; and the symmetry of ideas, added to the jingle of the rhymes, makes of a dialogue a concerto of love:

'*Phebe.* Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love.
Silvius. It is to be all made of sighs and tears;
And so am I for Phebe.
P. And I for Ganymede.
O. And I for Rosalind.
R. And I for no woman. . . .
S. It is to be all made of fantasy,
All made of passion, and all made of wishes,
All adoration, duty, and observance,
All humbleness, all patience and impatience,
All purity, all trial, all observance;
And so I am for Phebe.

[1] *As you Like it*, iv. 1.

P. And so am I for Ganymede.
O. And so am I for Rosalind.
R. And so am I for no woman.'[1]

The necessity of singing is so urgent, that a minute later songs break out of themselves. The prose and the conversation end in lyric poetry. We pass straight on into these odes. We do not find ourselves in a new country. We feel the distraction and foolish gaiety as if it were a holiday. We see the graceful couple whom the song brings before us, passing in the misty light 'o'er the green corn-field,' amid the hum of sportive insects, on the finest day of the flowering spring-time. The unlikelihood grows natural, and we are not astonished when we see Hymen leading the two brides by the hand to give them to their husbands.

Whilst the young folks sing, the old folk talk. Their life also is a romance, but a sad one. Shakspeare's delicate soul, bruised by the shocks of social life, took refuge in contemplations of solitary life. To forget the strife and annoyances of the world, he must bury himself in a wide silent forest, and

'Under the shade of melancholy boughs,
Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.'[2]

We may look at the bright images which the sun carves on the white beech-boles, the shade of trembling leaves flickering on the thick moss, the long waves of the summit of the trees; the sharp sting of care is blunted; we suffer no more, simply remembering that we suffered once; we feel nothing but a gentle misanthropy, and being renewed, we are the better for it. The old duke is happy in his exile. Solitude has given him rest, delivered him from flattery, reconciled him to nature. He pities the stags which he is obliged to hunt for food:

'Come, shall we go and kill us venison?
And yet it irks me the poor dappled fools,
Being native burghers of this desert city,
Should in their own confines with forked heads
Have their round haunches gored.'[3]

Nothing sweeter than this mixture of tender compassion, dreamy philosophy, delicate sadness, poetical complaints, and rustic songs. One of the lords sings:

'Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.

[1] *As you Like it*, v. 2. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 7. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 1.

Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.'[1]

Amongst these lords is found a soul that suffers more, Jacques the melancholy, one of Shakspeare's best-loved characters, a transparent mask behind which we perceive the face of the poet. He is sad because he is tender; he feels the contact of things too keenly, and what leaves the rest indifferent, makes him weep.[2] He does not scold, he is sad; he does not reason, he is moved; he has not the combative spirit of a reforming moralist; his soul is sick and weary of life. Impassioned imagination leads quickly to disgust. Like opium, it excites and shatters. It leads man to the loftiest philosophy, then lets him down to the whims of a child. Jacques leaves the others brusquely, and goes to the quiet nooks to be alone. He loves his sadness, and would not exchange it for joy. Meeting Orlando, he says:

'Rosalind is your love's name?
O. Yes, just.
J. I do not like her name.'[3]

He has the fancies of a nervous woman. He is scandalised because Orlando writes sonnets on the forest trees. He is whimsical, and finds subjects of grief and gaiety, where others would see nothing of the sort:

'A fool, a fool! I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool; A miserable world!
As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,
And rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms and yet a motley fool. . . .
O noble fool! A worthy fool! Motley's the only wear. . . .
O that I were a fool!
I am ambitious for a motley coat.'[4]

The next minute he returns to his melancholy dissertations, bright pictures whose vivacity explains his character, and betrays Shakspeare, hiding under his name:

'All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,

[1] *As you Like it*, ii. 7.

[2] Compare Jacques with the Alceste of Molière. It is the contrast between a misanthrope through reasoning and one through imagination.

[3] *As you Like it*, iii. 2. [4] *Ibid.* ii. 7.

And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.'[1]

As you Like it is a half-dream. *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a complete one.

The scene, buried in the far-off mist of fabulous antiquity, carries us back to Theseus, Duke of Athens, who is preparing his palace for his marriage with the beautiful queen of the Amazons. The style, loaded with contorted images, fills the mind with strange and splendid visions, and the airy elf-world divert the comedy into the fairy-land from whence it sprung.

Love is still the theme; of all sentiments, is it not the greatest fancy-weaver? But we have not here for language the charming tittle-tattle of Rosalind; it is glaring, like the season of the year. It does not brim over in slight conversations, in supple and skipping prose; it breaks forth into long rhyming odes, dressed in magnificent metaphors, sustained by impassioned accents, such as a warm night, odorous and star-spangled, inspires in a poet who loves. Lysander and Hermia agree to meet:

'*Lys.* To-morrow night, when Phœbe doth behold
Her silver visage in the watery glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,
A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal,
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.
Her. And in the wood, where often you and I
Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie. . . .
There my Lysander and myself shall meet.'[2]

They get lost, and fall asleep, wearied, under the trees. Puck squeezes in the youth's eyes the juice of a magic flower, and changes his heart.

[1] *As you Like it*, ii. 7.

[2] *Midsummer Night's Dream*, i. 1.

Presently, when he awakes, he will become enamoured of the first woman he sees. Meanwhile Demetrius, Hermia's rejected lover, wanders with Helena, whom he rejects, in the solitary wood. The magic flower changes him in turn: he now loves Helena. The lovers flee and pursue one another, beneath the lofty trees, in the calm night. We smile at their transports, their complaints, their ecstasies, and yet we join in them. This passion is a dream, and yet it moves us. It is like those airy webs which we find at morning on the crest of the hedgerows where the dew has spread them, and whose weft sparkles like a jewel-casket. Nothing can be more fragile, and nothing more graceful. The poet sports with emotions; he mingles, confuses, redoubles, interweaves them; he twines and untwines these loves like the mazes of a dance, and we see the noble and tender figures pass by the verdant bushes, under the radiant eyes of the stars, now wet with tears, now bright with rapture. They have the abandonment of true love, not the grossness of sensual love. Nothing causes us to fall from the ideal world in which Shakspeare conducts us. Dazzled by beauty, they adore it, and the spectacle of their happiness, their emotion, and their tenderness, is a kind of enchantment.

Above these two couples flutters and hums the swarm of elves and fairies. They also love. Titania, their queen, has a young boy for her favourite, son of an Indian king, of whom Oberon, her husband, wishes to deprive her. They quarrel, so that the elves creep for fear into the acorn cups, in the golden primroses. Oberon, by way of vengeance, touches Titania's sleeping eyes with the magic flower, and thus on waking the nimblest and most charming of the fairies finds herself enamoured of a stupid blockhead with an ass' head. She kneels before him; she sets on his 'hairy temples a coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers:'

> 'And that same dew, which sometime on the buds
> Was wont to swell like round and orient pearls,
> Stood now within the pretty flowerets' eyes,
> Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail.'[1]

She calls round her all her fairy attendants:

> 'Be kind and courteous to this gentleman;
> Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes;
> Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
> With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
> The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,
> And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs
> And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
> To have my love to bed and to arise;
> And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
> To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes. . . .
> Come, wait upon him; lead him to my bower.

[1] *Midsummer Night's Dream*, iv. 1.

The moon, methinks, looks with a watery eye;
And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,
Lamenting some enforced chastity.
Tie up my love's tongue, bring him silently.'[1]

It was necessary, for her love brayed horribly, and to all the offers of Titania, replied with a petition for hay. What can be sadder and sweeter than this irony of Shakspeare? What raillery against love, and what tenderness for love! The sentiment is divine: its object unworthy. The heart is ravished, the eyes blind. It is a golden butterfly, fluttering in the mud; and Shakspeare, whilst painting its misery, preserves all its beauty:

'Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy. . . .
Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms. . . .
So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle
Gently entwist; the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.
O, how I love thee! how I dote on thee!'[2]

At the return of morning, when

'The eastern gate, all fiery red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams,'[3]

the enchantment ceases, Titania awakes on her couch of wild thyme and drooping violets. She drives the monster away; her recollections of the night are effaced in a vague twilight:

'These things seem small and undistinguishable,
Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.'[4]

And the fairies

'Go seek some dew drops here
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.'[5]

Such is Shakspeare's fantasy, a light tissue of bold inventions, of ardent passions, melancholy mockery, dazzling poetry, such as one of Titania's elves would have made. Nothing could be more like the poet's mind than these nimble genii, children of air and flame, whose flights 'compass the globe' in a second, who glide over the foam of the waves and skip between the atoms of the winds. Ariel flies, an invisible songster, around shipwrecked men to console them, discovers the thoughts of

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[1] *Midsummer Night's Dream*, iii. 1.
[2] *Ibid.* iv. 1.
[3] *Ibid.* iii. 2.
[4] *Ibid.* iv. 1.
[5] *Ibid.* ii. 1.

traitors, pursues the savage beast Caliban, spreads gorgeous visions before lovers, and does all in a lightning-flash:

> 'Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
> In a cowslip's bell I lie. . . .
> Merrily, merrily shall I live now
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough. . . .
> I drink the air before me, and return
> Or ere your pulse twice beat.' [1]

Shakspeare glides over things on as swift a wing, by leaps as sudden, with a touch as delicate.

What a soul! what extent of action, and what sovereignty of an unique faculty! what diverse creations, and what persistence of the same impress! There they all are reunited, and all marked by the same sign, void of will and reason, governed by mood, imagination, or pure passion, destitute of the faculties contrary to those of the poet, dominated by the corporeal type which his painter's eyes have conceived, endowed by the habits of mind and by the vehement sensibility which he finds in himself.[2] Go through the groups, and you will only discover in them divers forms and divers states of the same power. Here, the flock of brutes, dotards, and gossips, made up of a mechanical imagination; further on, the company of men of wit, animated by a gay and foolish imagination; then, the charming swarm of women whom their delicate imagination raises so high, and their self-forgetting love carries so far; elsewhere the band of villains, hardened by unbridled passions, inspired by the artist's animation; in the centre the mournful train of grand characters, whose excited brain is filled with sad or criminal visions, and whom an inner destiny urges to murder, madness, or death. Ascend one stage, and contemplate the whole scene: the aggregate bears the same mark as the details. The drama reproduces promiscuously uglinesses, basenesses, horrors, unclean details, profligate and ferocious manners, the whole reality of life just as it is, when it is unrestrained by decorum, common sense, reason, and duty. Comedy, led through a phantasmagoria of pictures, gets lost in the likely and the unlikely, with no other check but the caprice of an amused imagination, wantonly disjointed, and romantic, an opera without music, a concerto of melancholy and tender sentiments, which bears the mind into the supernatural world, and brings before our eyes on its fairy-wings the genius which has created it. Look now. Do you not see the poet behind the crowd of his creations? They have heralded his approach; they have all shown somewhat of him. Ready, impetuous, impassioned, delicate, his genius is pure imagination, touched more vividly and by

[1] *Tempest*, v. 1.

[2] There is the same law in the organic and in the moral world. It is what Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire calls unity of composition.

slighter things than ours. Hence his style, blooming with exuberant images, loaded with exaggerated metaphors, whose strangeness is like incoherence, whose wealth is superabundant, the work of a mind, which at the least incitement, produces too much and leaps too far. Hence his implied psychology, and his terrible penetration, which instantaneously perceiving all the effects of a situation, and all the details of a character, concentrates them in every response, and gives his figure a relief and a colouring which create illusion. Hence our emotion and tenderness. We say to him, as Desdemona to Othello: 'I love thee for the battles, sieges, fortunes thou hast passed, and for the distressful stroke that thy youth suffered.'

CHAPTER V.

The Christian Renaissance.

I. The vices of the Pagan Renaissance—Decay of the Southern civilisations.

II. The Reformation—Aptitude of the Germanic races, and suitability of Northern climates—Albert Durer's bodies and souls—His martyrdoms and last judgments—Luther—His conception of justice—Construction of Protestantism—Crisis of the conscience—Renovation of heart—Suppression of ceremonies—Transformation of the clergy.

III. The Reformation in England—Tyranny of the ecclesiastical courts—Disorders of the clergy—Irritation of the people—The interior of a diocese—Persecutions and convulsions—The translation of the Bible—How biblical events and Hebraic sentiments are in accordance with contemporary manners and with the English character—*The Prayer Book*—Moral and manly feeling of the prayers and offices—Preaching—Latimer—His education—Character—Familiar and persuasive eloquence—Death—The martyrs under Mary—England thenceforth Protestant.

IV. The Anglicans—Close connection between religion and society—How the religious sentiment penetrates literature—How the sentiment of the beautiful subsists in religion—Hooker—His breadth of mind and the fulness of his style—Hales and Chillingworth—Praise of reason and tolerance—Jeremy Taylor—His learning, imagination, and poetic feeling.

V. The Puritans—Opposition of religion and the world—Dogmas—Morality—Scruples—Their triumph and enthusiasm—Their work and practical sense.

VI. Bunyan—His life, spirit, and work—The Prospect of Protestantism in England.

I.

'I WOULD have my reader fully understand,' says Luther in the preface to his complete works, 'that I have been a monk and a bigoted Papist, so intoxicated, or rather so swallowed up in papistical doctrines, that I was quite ready, if I had been able, to kill or procure the death of those who should have rejected obedience to the Pope by so much as a syllable. I was not all cold or all ice in the Pope's defence, like Eckius and his like, who veritably seemed to me to constitute themselves his defenders rather for their belly's sake than because they looked at the matter seriously. More, to this day they seem to mock at him, like Epicureans. I for my part proceeded frankly, like a man who has horribly feared the day of judgment, and who yet

hoped to be saved with a shaking of all his bones.' Again, when he saw Rome for the first time, he prostrated himself, saying, 'I salute thee, holy Rome . . . bathed in the blood of so many martyrs.' Imagine, if you may, the effect which the shameless paganism of the Italian Renaissance had upon such a mind, so loyal, so Christian. The beauty of art, the charm of a refined and sensuous existence, had taken no hold upon him; he judged morals, and he judged them with his conscience only. He regarded this southern civilisation with the eyes of a man of the north, and understood its vices only, like Ascham, who said he had seen 'in Venice more libertie to sinne in IX dayes than ever I heard tell of in our noble Citie of London in IX yeare.'[1] Like Arnold and Channing in the present day, like all the men of Germanic[2] race and education, he was horrified at this voluptuous life, now reckless and now licentious, but always void of moral principles, given up to passion, rendered light by irony, shut in by the present, destitute of belief in the infinite, with no other worship than that of visible beauty, no other object than the search after pleasure, no other religion than the terrors of the imagination and the idolatry of the eyes.

'I would not,' said Luther afterwards, 'for a hundred thousand florins have gone without seeing Rome; I should always have doubted whether I was not doing injustice to the Pope.[3] The crimes of Rome are incredible; no one will credit so great a perversity who has not the witness of his eyes, ears, personal knowledge. . . . There reigned all the villanies and infamies, all the atrocious crimes, in particular blind greed, contempt of God, perjuries, sodomy. . . . We Germans swill liquor enough to split us, whilst the Italians are sober. But they are the most impious of men; they make a mock of true religion, they scorn the rest of us Christians, because we believe everything in Scripture. . . . There is a saying in Italy which they make use of when they go to church: "Come and let us conform to the popular error." "If we were obliged," they say again, "to believe in every word of God, we should be the most wretched of men, and we should never be able to have a moment's cheerfulness; we must put a good face on it, and not believe everything." This is what Leo X. did, who, hearing a discussion as to the immortality or mortality of the soul, took the latter side. "For," said he, "it would be terrible to believe in a future state. Conscience is an evil beast, who arms man against himself." . . . The Italians are either epicureans or superstitious. The people fear St. Anthony and St. Sebastian more than Christ, because of the plagues they send. This is why, when they want to prevent the Italians from committing a nuisance anywhere, they paint up St. Anthony with his fiery lance. Thus do they live in extreme superstition, ignorant of

[1] Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570), ed. Arber, 1870, first book, p. 83.
[2] See, in *Corinne*, Lord Nevil's judgment on the Italians.
[3] *Table Talk, passim.*

God's word, not believing the resurrection of the flesh, nor life everlasting, and fearing only temporal evils. Their blasphemy also is frightful, . . . and the cruelty of their revenge is atrocious. When they cannot get rid of their enemies in any other way, they lay ambush for them in the churches, so that one man cleft his enemy's head before the altar. . . . There are often murders at funerals on account of inheritances. . . . They celebrate the Carnival with extreme impropriety and folly for several weeks, and they have made a custom of various sins and extravagances at it, for they are men without conscience, who live in open sin, and make light of the marriage tie. . . . We Germans, and other simple nations, are like a bare clout; but the Italians are painted and speckled with all sorts of false opinions, and disposed still to embrace many worse. . . . Their fasts are more splendid than our most sumptuous feasts. They dress extravagantly; where we spend a florin on our clothes, they put down ten florins to have a silk coat. . . . When they (the Italians) are chaste, it is sodomy with them. There is no society amongst them. No one trusts another; they do not come together freely, like us Germans; they do not allow strangers to speak publicly with their wives: compared with the Germans, they are altogether men of the cloister.' These hard words are weak compared with the facts.[1] Treasons, assassinations, tortures, open debauchery, the practice of poisoning, the worst and most shameless outrages, are unblushingly and publicly tolerated in the open light of heaven. In 1490, the Pope's vicar having forbidden clerics and laics to keep concubines, the Pope revoked the decree, 'saying that that was not forbidden, because the life of priests and ecclesiastics was such that hardly one was to be found who did not keep a concubine, or at least who had not a courtesan.' Cæsar Borgia at the capture of Capua 'chose forty of the most beautiful women, whom he kept for himself; and a pretty large number of captives were sold at a low price at Rome.' Under Alexander VI., 'all ecclesiastics, from the greatest to the least, have concubines in the place of wives, and that publicly. If God hinder it not,' adds the historian, 'this corruption will pass to the monks and religious orders, although, to confess the truth, almost all the monasteries of the town have become bawd-houses, without any one to speak against it.' With respect to Alexander VI., who loved his daughter Lucretia, the reader may find in Burchard the description of the marvellous orgies in which he joined with Lucretia and Cæsar, and the enumeration of the prizes which he distributed. Let the reader also read for himself the story of the bestiality of Pietro Luigi Farnese, the Pope's son, how the young and upright Bishop of Fano died from his outrage, and how the Pope, speaking of this crime as 'a youthful levity,'

[1] See *Corpus historicorum medii ævi*, G. Eccard, vol. ii.; Joh. Burchardi, high chamberlain to Alexander VI., *Diarium*, p. 2134. Guicciardini, *Dell' istoria d'Italia*, p. 211, ed. Panthéon Littéraire.

gave him in this secret bull 'the fullest absolution from all the pains which he might have incurred by human incontinence, in whatever shape or with whatever cause.' As to civil security, Bentivoglio caused all the Marescotti to be put to death; Hippolyto d'Este had his brother's eyes put out in his presence; Cæsar Borgia killed his brother; murder is consonant with their public manners, and excites no wonder. A fisherman was asked why he had not informed the governor of the town that he had seen a body thrown into the water; 'he replied that he had seen about a hundred bodies thrown into the water during his lifetime in the same place, and that no one had ever troubled about it.' 'In our town,' says an old historian, 'much murder and pillage was done by day and night, and hardly a day passed but some one was killed.' Cæsar Borgia one day killed Peroso, the Pope's favourite, between his arms and under his cloak, so that the blood spurted up to the Pope's face. He caused his sister's husband to be stabbed and then strangled in open day, on the steps of the palace; count, if you can, his assassinations. Certainly he and his father, by their character, morals, open and systematic wickedness, have presented to Europe the two most successful images of the devil. To sum up in a word, it was on the model of this society, and for this society, that Machiavelli wrote his *Prince*. The complete development of all the faculties and all the lusts of man, the complete destruction of all the restraints and all the shame of man, are the two distinguishing marks of this grand and perverse culture. To make man a strong being, hedged about with genius, audacity, presence of mind, astute policy, dissimulation, patience, and to turn all this power to the acquisition of every kind of pleasure, pleasures of the body, of luxury, arts, literature, authority; that is, to form and to set free an admirable and formidable animal, very greedy and well armed,—such was his object; and the effect, after a hundred years, is visible. They tore one another to pieces like beautiful lions and superb panthers. In this society, which was turned into a circus, amid so many hatreds, and when exhaustion was setting in, the foreigner appeared: all bent beneath his lash; they were caged, and thus they pine away, in dull pleasures, with low vices,[1] bowing their backs. Despotism, the Inquisition, the Cicisbei, dense ignorance, and open knavery, the shamelessness and the smartness of harlequins and rascals, misery and vermin, —such is the issue of the Italian Renaissance. Like the old civilisations of Greece and Rome,[2] like the modern civilisations of Provence and Spain, like all southern civilisations, it bears in its bosom an irremediable vice, a bad and false conception of man. The Germans of the sixteenth century, like the Germans of the fourteenth century, have rightly

[1] See, in Casanova's *Mémoires*, the picture of this degradation. See also the *Memorie* of Scipione Rossi, on the convents of Tuscany at the close of the eighteenth century.

[2] From Homer to Constantine, the ancient city was an association of freemen, whose aim was the conquest and destruction of other freemen.

judged it; with their simple common sense, with their fundamental honesty, they have put their fingers on the secret plague-spot. A society cannot be founded only on the pursuit of pleasure and power; a society can only be founded on the respect for liberty and justice. In order that the great human renovation which in the sixteenth century raised the whole of Europe might be perfected and endure, it was necessary that, meeting with another race, it might develop another culture, and that from a more wholesome conception of existence it might educe a better form of civilisation.

II.

Thus, side by side with the Renaissance, was born the Reformation. It also was in fact a new birth, one in harmony with the genius of the Germanic peoples. The distinction between this genius and others is its moral principles. Grosser and heavier, more given to gluttony and drunkenness,[1] these nations are at the same time more under the influence of conscience, firmer in the observance of their word, more disposed to self-denial and sacrifice. Such their climate has made them; and such they have continued, from Tacitus to Luther, from Knox to Gustavus Adolphus and Kant. In the course of time, and beneath the incessant action of the ages, the phlegmatic body, puffed out with gross food and strong drink, had become rusted, the nerves less excitable, the muscles less strung, the desires less seconded by action, the life more dull and slow, the soul more hardened and indifferent to the shocks of the body: mud, rain, snow, profusion of unpleasing and gloomy sights, the want of lively and delicate excitements of the senses, keep man in a militant attitude. Heroes in the barbarous ages, workers to-day, they endure weariness now as they courted wounds then; now, as then, nobility of soul appeals to them; thrown back upon the enjoyments of the soul, they find in these a world, the world of moral beauty. For them the ideal is displaced; it is no longer

[1] *Mémoires de la Margrave de Baireuth.* See also Misson, *Voyage en Italie*, 1700. Compare the manners of the students at the present day. 'The Germans are, as you know, wonderful drinkers: no people in the world are more flattering, more civil, more officious; but yet they have terrible customs in the matter of drinking. With them everything is done drinking; they drink in doing everything. There was not time during a visit to say three words, before you were astonished to see the collation arrive, or at least a few jugs of wine, accompanied by a plate of crusts of bread, dished up with pepper and salt; a fatal preparative for bad drinkers. You must be acquainted with the laws which are afterwards observed, sacred and inviolable laws. You must never drink without drinking to some one's health; also, after drinking, you must offer the wine to him whose health you have drunk. You must never refuse the glass which is offered to you, and you must naturally drain it to its last drop. Reflect a little, I beseech you, on these customs, and see how it is possible to cease drinking; accordingly, they never cease. In Germany it is a perpetual drinking-bout; to drink in Germany is to drink for ever.'

amidst forms, made up of force and joy, but it is transferred to sentiments, made up of truth, law, attachment to duty, observance of order. What matters it if the storm rages and if it snows, if the wind blusters in the black pine-forests, or on the wan sea-surges where the sea-gulls scream, if a man, stiff and blue with cold, shutting himself up in his cottage, have but a dish of sourcrout or a piece of salt beef, under his smoky light and beside his fire of turf; another kingdom opens to reward him, the kingdom of inward contentment: his wife loves him, and is faithful; his children round his hearth spell out the old family Bible; he is the master in his home, the protector, the benefactor, honoured by others, honoured by himself; and if so be that he needs assistance, he knows that at the first appeal he will see his neighbours stand faithfully and bravely by his side. The reader need only refer to the portraits of the time, those of Italy and Germany; he will comprehend at a glance the two races and the two civilisations, the Renaissance and the Reformation: on one side, a half-naked condottiere in Roman costume, a cardinal in his robes, amply draped, in a rich arm-chair, carved and adorned with heads of lions, leaves, dancing fauns, he himself satirical and voluptuous, with the easy and dangerous look of a politician and man of the world, craftily poised and on his guard; on the other side, some honest doctor, a theologian, a simple man, with badly combed locks, stiff as a post, in his simple gown of coarse black serge, with big books of dogma ponderously clasped, a conscientious worker, an exemplary father of a family. See now the great artist of the age, a laborious and conscientious workman, a follower of Luther's,[1] a true Northman—Albert Durer. He also, like Raphael and Titian, has his ideal of man, an inexhaustible ideal, whence spring by hundreds living figures and the representations of manners, but how national and original! No care for expansive and happy beauty: to him nude bodies are but bodies undressed: straight shoulders, prominent stomachs, thin legs, feet pinched by shoes, his neighbour the carpenter's, or his gossip the sausage-seller's. The heads stand out in his etchings, remorselessly scraped and scooped away, savage or commonplace, often wrinkled by the fatigues of trade, generally sad, anxious, and patient, harshly and wretchedly transformed by the necessities of life. Where is the vista out of this minute copy of unsavoury truth? To what land will the lofty and melancholy imagination betake itself? The land of dreams, strange dreams, swarming with deep thoughts, sad contemplation of human destiny, a vague notion of the great enigma, groping reflection, which in the dimness of the rough woodcuts, amidst obscure emblems and fantastic figures, tries to seize upon truth and justice. There was no need to search so far; Durer had grasped them at the first effort. If there is any decency in the world, it is in the Madonnas

[1] See his letters, and the sympathy expressed for Luther.

which are constantly springing to life under his pencil. He was not, like Raphael, beginning by making them nude; the most licentious hand would not venture to disturb one stiff fold of their robes; with infant in arms, they think but of him, and will never think beyond him; not only are they innocent, but they are virtuous. The good German housewife, for ever shut up, voluntarily and naturally, within her domestic duties and contentment, breathes out in all the fundamental sincerity, the seriousness, the unassailable loyalty of their attitudes and looks. He has done more; with this peaceful virtue he has painted a militant virtue. There at last is the genuine Christ, the man crucified, lean and fleshless through his agony, whose blood drops minute by minute in rarer drops, as the feebler and feebler pulsations give warning of the last throe of a dying life. Not here, as in the Italian masters, a sight to charm the eyes, a mere flow of drapery, a disposition of groups. The heart, the very heart, is wounded by this sight: it is the just man oppressed, who is dying because the world hates justice. The mighty, the men of the age, are there, indifferent, satirical: a plumed knight, a big-bellied burgomaster, who, with hands folded behind his back, looks on, kills an hour. But the rest weep; above the fainting women, angels full of anguish catch in their vessels the holy blood as it trickles down, and the stars of heaven veil their face not to behold so tremendous an outrage. Other outrages will come after; tortures manifold, and the true martyrs beside the true Christ, resigned, silent, with the sweet expression of the earliest believers. They are bound to an old tree, and the executioner tears them with his iron-pointed lash. A bishop with clasped hands is praying where they have stretched him, whilst an auger is being screwed into his eye. Above, amid the interlacing trees and gnarled roots, a band of men and women climb under the lash the breast of a hill, and from the crest they are hurled at the lance's point into the abyss; here and there roll heads, stiffening bodies; and by the side of those who are being decapitated, the swollen corpses, impaled, await the croaking ravens. All these sufferings must be undergone for the confession of faith and the establishment of justice. But above there is a guardian, an avenger, an all-powerful Judge, whose day shall come. This light will shine, and the piercing rays of the last sun already play, like a handful of darts, across the darkness of the age. In the summit of heaven appears the angel in his shining robe, leading the eager hosts, the flashing swords, the inevitable arrows of the avengers, who are to trample upon and punish the earth; mankind falls down beneath their charge, and now the jaw of the infernal monster grinds the head of the wicked prelates. This is the popular poem of conscience, and from the days of the apostles, man has not had a more sublime and complete conception.[1]

[1] See a collection of Albert Durer's wood-carvings. Remark the resemblance of his *Apocalypse* to Luther's familiar *Table Talk*.

For conscience, like other things, has its poem; by a natural invasion the all-powerful idea of justice overflows from the soul, covers heaven, and enthrones there a new deity. A formidable deity, who is scarcely like the calm intelligence which serves philosophers to explain the order of things; nor to that tolerant deity, a kind of constitutional king, whom Voltaire discovered at the end of a chain of argument, whom Beranger sings of as of a comrade, and whom he salutes 'sans lui demander rien.' It is the just Judge, sinless and stern, who exacts of man a strict account of his visible actions and of all his invisible feelings, who tolerates no forgetfulness, no dejection, no failing, before whom every approach to weakness or error is an outrage and a treason. What is our justice before this strict justice? People lived at peace in the times of ignorance; at most, when they felt themselves to blame, they went for absolution to a priest; all was ended by their buying a kindly indulgence; there was a tariff, as there still is; Tetzel the Dominican declares that all sins are blotted out 'as soon as the money chinks in the box.' Whatever be the crime, there is a quittance; even '*si Dei matrem violavisset*,' he might go home clean and sure of heaven. Unfortunately the vendors of pardons did not know that all was changed, and that the intellect was become manly, no longer gabbling words mechanically like a catechism, but sounding them anxiously like a truth. In the universal Renaissance, and in the mighty growth of all human ideas, the German idea of duty blooms like the rest. Now, when we speak of justice, it is no longer a lifeless phrase which we repeat, but a living idea which we produce; man sees the object which it represents, and feels the emotion which summons it up; he no longer receives, but he creates it; it is his work and his tyrant; he makes it, and submits to it. 'These words *justus* and *justitia Dei*,' says Luther, 'were a thunder to my conscience. I shuddered to hear them; I told myself, if God is just, He will punish me.'[1] For as soon as the conscience discovers the idea of the perfect model,[2] the least feelings appeared to them to be crimes, and man, condemned by his own scruples, fell prostrate, and, 'as it were, swallowed up' with horror. 'I, who lived the life of a spotless monk,' says Luther, 'yet felt within me the troubled conscience of a sinner, without managing to assure myself as to the satisfaction which I owed to God. . . . Then I said to myself: Am I then the only one who ought to be sad in my spirit? . . .

[1] Calvin, the logician of the Reformation, well explains the dependence of all the Protestant ideas in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, i. (1.) The idea of the perfect God, the stern Judge. (2.) The alarm of conscience. (3.) The impotence and corruption of nature. (4.) The advent of free grace. (5.) The rejection of rites and ceremonies.

[2] 'In the measure in which pride is rooted within us, it always appears to us as though we were just and whole, good and holy; unless we are convinced by manifest arguments of our injustice, uncleanness, folly, and impurity. For we are not convinced of it if we turn our eyes to our own persons merely, and

Oh, what horrible spectres and figures I used to see!' Thus alarmed, conscience believes that the terrible day is at hand. 'The end of the world is near. . . . Our children will see it; perchance we ourselves.' Once in this mood he had terrible dreams for six months at a time. Like the Christians of the Apocalypse, he fixes the moment: it will come at Easter, or at the Conversion of Saint Paul. One theologian, his friend, thought of giving all his goods to the poor; 'but would they receive it?' he said. 'To-morrow night we shall be seated in heaven.' Under such anguish the body gives way. For fourteen days Luther was in such a condition, that he could neither drink, eat, nor sleep. 'Day and night,' his eyes fixed on a text of Saint Paul, he saw the Judge, and His inevitable hands. Such is the tragedy which is enacted in all Protestant souls—the eternal tragedy of the conscience; and its issue is a new religion.

For nature alone and unassisted cannot rise from this abyss by itself. 'It is so corrupted, that it does not feel the desire for heavenly things. . . . There is in it before God nothing but lust.' Good intentions cannot spring from it. 'For, terrified by the vision of his sin, man could not resolve to do good, troubled and anxious as he is; on the contrary, abased and crushed by the weight of his sin, he falls into despair and hatred of God, as it was with Cain, Saul, Judas;' so that, abandoned to himself, he can find nothing within him but the rage and the oppression of a despairing wretch or a devil. In vain he might try to recover himself by good works: our good deeds are not pure; even though pure, they do not wipe out the stain of previous sins, and moreover they do not take away the original corruption of the heart: they are only boughs and blossoms, the inherited poison is in the sap. Man must descend to the heart, underneath literal obedience and the reach of law; from the kingdom of law he must penetrate into that of grace; from exacted righteousness to spontaneous goodness; beneath his original nature, which led him to selfishness and earthly things, a second nature is developed, leading him to sacrifice and heavenly things. Neither my works, nor my justice, nor the works or justice of any creature or of all creatures, could work in me this wonderful change. One alone can do it, the pure God, the Just Victim, the Saviour, the Redeemer, Jesus, my Christ, by imputing to me His justice, by pouring upon me His merits, by drowning my sin under His sacrifice.

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if we do not think also of God, who is the only rule by which we must shape and complete this judgment. . . . And then that which had a fair appearance of virtue will be found to be nothing but weakness.

'This is the source of that horror and wonder by which the Scriptures tell us the saints were afflicted and cast down, when and as often as they felt the presence of God. For we see those who were as it might be far from God, and who were confident and went about with a stiff neck, as soon as He displayed His glory to them, they were shaken and terrified, so much so that they were overwhelmed, nay swallowed up in the horror of death, and that they fainted away.'

The world is a 'mass of perdition,'[1] predestined to hell. Lord Jesus, draw me back, select me from this mass. I have no claim to it; there is nothing in me not abominable; this very prayer is inspired and formed within me by Thee. But I weep, and my breast heaves, and my heart is broken. Lord, let me feel myself redeemed, pardoned, Thy elect one, Thy faithful one; give me grace, and give me faith! 'Then,' says Luther, 'I felt myself born anew, and it seemed that I was entering the open gates of heaven.'

What remains to be done after this renovation of the heart? Nothing: all religion is in that: the rest must be reduced or suppressed; it is a personal affair, a secret dialogue between man and God, where there are only two things in question,—the very word of God as it is transmitted by Scripture, and the emotions of the heart of man, as the word of God excites and maintains them.[2] Let us do away with the rites that appeal to the senses, wherewith men would replace this intercourse between the invisible mind and the visible judge,—mortifications, fasts, corporeal penance, Lent, vows of chastity and poverty, rosaries, indulgences; rites serve only to smother living piety beneath mechanical works. Away with the mediators by which men have attempted to impede the direct intercourse between God and man,—namely, saints, the Virgin, the Pope, the priest; whosoever adores or obeys them is an idolater. Neither saints nor Virgin can convert or save us; God alone by His Christ can convert and save. Neither Pope nor priest can fix our faith or forgive our sins; God alone instructs us by His word, and absolves us by His pardon. No more pilgrimages or relics; no more traditions or auricular confessions. A new church appears, and therewith a new worship; ministers of religion change their tone, the worship of God its form; the authority of the clergy is diminished, and the pomp of services is reduced: they are reduced and diminished the more, because the primitive idea of the new theology is more absorbing; so much so, that in certain sects they have disappeared altogether. The priest descends from the lofty position in which the right of forgiving sins and of regulating faith had raised him over the heads of the laity; he returns to civil society, marries like the rest, begins to be once more an equal, is merely a more learned and pious man than

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[1] Saint Augustine.

[2] Melanchthon, preface to *Luther's Works:* 'It is clear that the works of Thomas, Scotus, and the like, are utterly silent about the element of justification by faith, and contain many errors concerning the most important questions relating to the church. It is clear that the discourses of the monks in their churches almost throughout the world were either fables about purgatory and the saints, or else some kind of dogma of law or discipline, without a word of the gospel concerning Christ, or else were vain trifles about distinctions in the matter of food, about feasts and other human traditions. . . . The gospel is pure, incorruptible, and not diluted with Gentile opinions.' See also Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, 8 vols., ed. Townsend, 1843, ii. 42.

others, their elect and their adviser. The church becomes a temple, empty of images, decorations, ceremonies, sometimes altogether bare; a simple meeting-house, where, between whitewashed walls, from a plain pulpit, a man in a black gown speaks without gesticulations, reads a passage from the Bible, begins a hymn, which the congregation takes up. There is another place of prayer, as little adorned and not less venerated, the domestic hearth, where every night the father of the family, before his servants and his children, prays aloud and reads the Scriptures. An austere and free religion, purged from sensualism and obedience, interior and personal, which, set on foot by the awakening of the conscience, could only be established among races in which each man found within his nature the persuasion that he alone is responsible for his actions, and always bound to the observance of his duty.

III.

It must be admitted that the Reformation entered England by a side door; but it is enough that it came in, whatever the manner: for great revolutions are not introduced by court intrigues and official sleight of hand, but by social conditions and popular instincts. When five millions of men are converted, it is because five millions of men wish to be converted. Let us therefore leave on one side the intrigues in high places, the scruples and passions of Henry VIII.,[1] the pliability and plausibility of Cranmer, the vacillations and basenesses of the Parliament, the oscillation and tardiness of the Reformation, begun, then arrested, then pushed forward, then with one blow violently pushed back, then spread over the whole nation, and hedged in by a legal establishment, a singular establishment, built up from discordant materials, but yet solid and durable. Every great change has its root in the soul, and we have only to look closer into this deep soil to discover the national inclinations and the secular irritations from which Protestantism has issued.

A hundred and fifty years before, it had been on the point of bursting forth; Wycliff had appeared, the Lollards had sprung up, the Bible had been translated; the Commons had proposed the confiscation of ecclesiastical property; then, under the pressure of the united Church, royalty and aristocracy, the growing Reformation being crushed, disappeared underground, only to reappear at long intervals by the sufferings of its martyrs. The bishops had received the right of imprisoning without trial laymen suspected of heresy; they had burned Lord Cobham alive; the kings chose their ministers from the bench; settled in authority and pride, they had made the nobility and people bend under the secular sword which had been entrusted to them, and in their hands the stern network of law, which from the Conquest had compressed the nation in its iron grasp, had become more stringent

[1] See Froude, *History of England*, i.–vi. The conduct of Henry VIII. is there presented in a new light.

and more injurious. Venial acts had been construed into crimes, and the judicial repression, extended to faults as well as to outrages, had changed the police into an inquisition. '"Offences against chastity," "heresy," or "matter sounding thereunto," "witchcraft," "drunkenness," "scandal," "defamation," "impatient words," "broken promises," "untruth," "absence from church," "speaking evil of saints," "non-payment of offerings," complaints against the constitutions of the courts themselves;'[1] all these transgressions, imputed or suspected, brought folk before the ecclesiastical tribunals, at enormous expense, with long delays, from great distances, under a captious procedure, resulting in heavy fines, strict imprisonments, humiliating abjurations, public penances, and the menace, often fulfilled, of torture and the stake. Judge from a single fact: the Earl of Surrey, a relative of the king, was accused before one of these tribunals of having neglected a fast. Imagine, if you can, the minute and incessant oppressiveness of such a code; to what a point the whole of human life, visible actions and invisible thoughts, was surrounded and held down by it; how by enforced accusations it penetrated to every hearth and into every conscience; with what shamelessness it was transformed into a vehicle for extortions; what secret anger it excited in these townsfolk, these peasants, obliged sometimes to travel sixty miles and back, to leave in one or other of the numberless talons of the law[2] a part of their savings, sometimes their whole substance and that of their children. A man begins to think when he is thus down-trodden; he asks himself quietly if it is really by divine dispensation that mitred thieves thus practise tyranny and pillage; he looks more closely into their lives; he wants to know if they themselves practise the regularity which they impose on others; and on a sudden he learns strange things. Cardinal Wolsey writes to the Pope, that 'both the secular and regular priests were in the habit of committing atrocious crimes, for which, if not in orders, they would have been promptly executed;[3] and the laity were scandalised to see such persons not only not degraded, but escaping with complete impunity.' A priest convicted of incest with the prioress of Kilbourn was simply condemned to carry a cross in a procession, and to pay three shillings and fourpence; at which rate, I fancy, he would renew the practice. In the preceding reign (Henry VII.) the gentlemen and farmers of Carnarvonshire had laid a complaint accusing the clergy of systematically seducing their wives and daughters. There were brothels in London for the especial use of priests. As to the abuse of the confessional, read in the original the familiarities to which it opened the door.[4] The

[1] Froude, i. 191. *Petition of Commons.* This public and authentic protest shows up all the details of clerical organisation and oppression.

[2] Froude, i. 26; ii. 192. [3] In May 1528. Froude, i. 194.

[4] Hale, *Criminal Causes. Suppression of the Monasteries*, Camden Soc. Publications. Froude, i. 194–201.

bishops gave livings to their children whilst they were still young. The holy Father Prior of Maiden Bradley hath but six children, and but one daughter married yet of the goods of the monastery; trusting shortly to marry the rest. The monks used to drink after supper till ten or twelve next morning, and come to matins drunk. They played cards or dice. Some came to service in the afternoons, and only then for fear of corporal punishments. The royal visitors found concubines in the secret apartments of the abbots. At the nunnery of Sion, the confessors seduced the nuns and absolved them at the same time. There were convents, Burnet tells us, where all the recluses were found pregnant. About 'two-thirds' of the English monks lived in such sort, that 'when their enormities were first read in the Parliament House, there was nothing but "Down with them!"'[1] What a spectacle for a nation in whom reason and conscience were awakening! Long before the great outburst, the public indignation muttered ominously, and was accumulating for the revolt; priests were yelled at in the streets or 'thrown into the kennel;' women would not 'receive the sacrament from hands which they thought polluted.'[2] When the apparitor of the ecclesiastical courts came to serve a process, he was driven away with insults. 'Go thy way, thou stynkyng knave, ye are but knaves and brybours everych one of you.' A mercer broke an apparitor's head with his yard. 'A waiter at the sign of the Cock' said 'that the sight of a priest did make him sick, and that he would go sixty miles to indict a priest.' Bishop Fitz-James wrote to Wolsey, that the juries in London were 'so maliciously set *in favorem hæreticæ pravitatis*, that they will cast and condemn any clerk, though he were as innocent as Abel.'[3] Wolsey himself spoke to the Pope of the 'dangerous spirit' which was spread abroad among the people, and he foresaw a Reformation. When Henry VIII. laid the axe to the tree, and slowly, with mistrust, struck a blow, then a second lopping off the branches, there were a thousand, nay, a hundred thousand hearts which approved of it, and would themselves have struck the trunk.

Consider the internal state of a diocese, that of Lincoln for instance,[4] at this period, about 1521, and judge by this example of the manner in which the ecclesiastical machinery works throughout the whole of England, multiplying martyrs, hatreds, and conversions. Bishop Longland summons the relatives of the accused, brothers, women, and children, and administers the oath; as they have already been prosecuted and have abjured, they must make oath, or they are relapsed, and the fagots await them. Then they denounce their kinsman and

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[1] Latimer's *Sermons*.

[2] They called them '*horsyn prestes*,' '*horson*,' or '*whorson knaves*.' Hale, p. 99; quoted by Froude, i. 199.

[3] Froude, i. 101 (1514).

[4] Fox, *Acts and Monuments*, iv. 221.

themselves. One has taught the other in English the Epistle of Saint James. This man, having forgotten several words of the *Pater* and *Credo* in Latin, can only repeat them in English. A woman turned her face from the cross which was carried about on Easter morning. Several at church, especially at the moment of the elevation, would not say their prayers, and remained seated 'dumb as beasts.' Three men, including a carpenter, passed a night together reading a book of the Scriptures. A pregnant woman went to mass not fasting. A brazier denied the Real Presence. A brickmaker kept the Apocalypse in his possession. A thresher said, as he pointed to his work, that he was going to make God come out of his straw. Others spoke lightly of pilgrimage, or of the Pope, or of relics, or of confession. And then fifty of them were condemned the same year to abjure, to promise to denounce each other, and to do penance all their lives, on pain of being burnt as relapsed heretics. They were shut up in different 'monasteries;' there they were to be maintained by alms, and to work for their support; they were to appear with a fagot on their shoulders at market, and in the procession on Sunday, then in a general procession, then at the punishment of a heretic; 'they were to fast on bread and ale only every Friday during their life, and every Even of Corpus Christy on bread and water, and carry a visible mark on their cheek.' Beyond that, six were burnt alive, and the children of one, John Scrivener, were obliged themselves to set fire to their father's wood pile. Do you think that a man, burnt or shut up, was altogether done with? He is silenced, I admit, or he is hidden; but long memories and bitter resentments endure under a forced silence. People saw[1] their companion, relation, brother, bound by an iron chain, with clasped hands, praying amid the smoke, whilst the flame blackened his skin and destroyed his flesh. Such sights are not forgotten; the last words uttered on the fagot, the last appeals to God and Christ, remain in their hearts all-powerful and ineffaceable. They carry them about with them, and silently ponder over them in the fields, at their labour, when they think themselves alone; and then, darkly, passionately, their brains work. For, beyond this universal sympathy which gathers mankind about the oppressed, there is the working of the religious sentiment. The crisis of conscience has begun which is natural to this race; they meditate on salvation, they are alarmed at their condition: terrified at the judgments of God, they ask themselves whether, living under imposed obedience and ceremonies, they do not become culpable, and merit damnation. Can this terror be smothered by prisons and torture? Fear against fear, the only question is, which is the strongest? They will soon know it: for the peculiarity of these inward anxieties is that they grow beneath

[1] See, *passim*, the prints of Fox. All the details which follow are from biographies. See those of Cromwell, by Carlyle, of Fox the Quaker, of Bunyan, and the trials reported at length by Fox.

constraint and oppression; as a welling spring which we vainly try to stamp out under stones, they bubble and leap up and swell, until their excessive accumulation bursts out, disjointing or splitting the regular masonry under which men endeavoured to bury them. In the solitude of the fields, or during the long winter nights, men dream; soon they fear, and become gloomy. On Sunday at church, obliged to cross themselves, to kneel before the cross, to receive the host, they shudder, and think it a mortal sin. They cease to talk to their friends, remain for hours with bowed heads, sorrowful; at night their wives hear them sigh; unable to sleep, they rise from their beds. Picture such a wan figure, full of anguish, nourishing under his sternness and coolness a secret ardour: he is still to be found in England in the poor shabby dissenter, who, Bible in hand, stands up suddenly to preach at a street corner; in those long-faced men who, after the service, not having had enough of the prayers, sing a hymn out in the street. The sombre imagination has started, like a woman in labour, and its conception swells day by day, tearing him who contains it. Through the long muddy winter, the complaint of the wind sighing among the ill-fitting rafters, the melancholy of the sky, continually flooded with rain or covered with clouds, add to the gloom of the lugubrious dream. Thenceforth man has made up his mind; he will be saved at all costs. At the peril of his life, he obtains one of the books which teach the way of salvation, Wycliff's *Wicket Gate*, *The Obedience of a Christian*, or sometimes Luther's *Revelation of Antichrist*, but above all some portion of the word of God, which Tyndale had just translated. One hid his books in a hollow tree; another learned by heart an epistle or a gospel, so as to be able to ponder it to himself even in the presence of his accusers. When sure of his friend, he speaks with him in private; and peasant talking to peasant, labourer to labourer—you know what the effect would be. It was the yeomen's sons, as Latimer said, who more than all others maintained the faith of Christ in England;[1] and it was with the yeomen's sons that Cromwell afterwards reaped his Puritan victories. When such words are whispered through a nation, all official voices clamour in vain: the nation has found its poem, it stops its ears to the troublesome would-be distractors, and presently sings it out with a full voice and from a full heart.

But the contagion had even reached the men in office, and Henry VIII. at last permitted the English Bible to be published.[2] England had her book. Every one, says Strype, who could buy this book either read it assiduously, or had it read to him by others, and many well advanced in years learned to read with the same object. On Sunday the poor folk gathered at the bottom of the churches to hear it read.

[1] Froude, ii. 33: 'The bishops said in 1529, "In the crime of heresy, thanked be God, there hath no notable person fallen in our time."'

[2] In 1536. Strype's *Memorials*, appendix. Froude, iii. ch. 12.

Maldon, a young man, afterwards related that he had clubbed his savings with an apprentice to buy a New Testament, and that for fear of his father, they had hidden it in their straw mattress. In vain the king in his proclamation had ordered people not to rest too much upon their own sense, ideas, or opinions; not to reason publicly about it in the public taverns and alehouses, but to have recourse to learned and authorised men; the seed sprouted, and they chose rather to take God's word in the matter than men's. Maldon declared to his mother that he would not kneel to the crucifix any longer, and his father in a rage beat him severely, and was ready to hang him. The preface itself invited men to independent study, saying that 'the Bishop of Rome has studied long to keep the Bible from the people, and specially from princes, lest they should find out his tricks and his falsehoods; . . . knowing well enough, that if the clear sun of God's word came over the heat of the day, it would drive away the foul mist of his devilish doctrines.'[1] Even on the admission, then, of official voices, they had there the pure and the whole truth, not merely speculative but moral truth, without which we cannot live worthily or be saved. Tyndale the translator says:

'The right waye (yea and the onely waye) to understand the Scripture unto salvation, is that we ernestlye and above all thynge serche for the profession of our baptisme or covenauntes made betwene God and us. As for an example. Christe sayth, Mat. v., Happy are the mercyfull, for they shall obtayne mercye. Lo, here God hath made a covenaunt wyth us, to be mercyfull unto us, yf we wyll be mercyfull one to another.'

What an expression! and with what ardour men pricked by the ceaseless reproaches of a scrupulous conscience, and the presentiment of the dark future, would lavish on these pages the whole attention of eyes and heart!

I have before me one of these old square folios,[2] in black letter, in which the pages, worn by horny fingers, have been patched together, in which an old engraving figures forth to the poor folk the deeds and menaces of the God of Israel, in which the preface and table of contents point out to simple people the moral which is to be drawn from each tragic history, and the application which is to be made of each venerable precept. Hence have sprung much of the English language, and half of the English manners; to this day the country is biblical;[3] it was these big books which had transformed Shakspeare's England. To understand this great change, try to picture these yeomen, these shopkeepers, who in the evening placed this Bible on their table, and bareheaded, with veneration, heard or read one of its chapters. Think that they have no other books, that theirs was a virgin mind, that every

[1] Coverdale. Froude, iii. 81. [2] 1549. Tyndale's translation.
[3] An expression of Stendhal's; it was his general impression.

impression would make a furrow, that the monotony of mechanical existence rendered them entirely open to new emotions, that they opened this book not for amusement, but to discover in it their doom of life and death; in brief, that the sombre and impassioned imagination of the race raised them to the level of the grandeurs and terrors which were to pass before their eyes. Tyndale, the translator, wrote with such sentiments, condemned, hunted, in concealment, his spirit full of the idea of a speedy death, and of the great God for whom at last he mounted the funeral pyre; and the spectators who had seen the remorse of Macbeth[1] and the murders of Shakspeare can listen to the despair of David, and the massacres accumulated under Judges and Kings. The short Hebrew verse-style took hold upon them by its uncultivated severity. They have no need, like the French, to have the ideas developed, explained in fine clear language, to be modified and bound together.[2] The serious and pulsating tone shakes them at once; they understand it with the imagination and the heart; they are not, like Frenchmen, enslaved to logical regularity; and the old text, so confused, so lofty and terrible, can retain in their language its wildness and its majesty. More than any people in Europe, by their innate concentration and rigidity, they realise the Semitic conception of the solitary and almighty God; a strange conception, which we, with all our critical methods, have hardly reconstructed at the present day. For the Jew, for the powerful minds who wrote the Pentateuch,[3] for the prophets and authors of the Psalms, life as we conceive it, was secluded from living things, plants, animals, firmament, sensible objects, to be carried and concentrated entirely in the one Being of whom they are the work and the puppets. Earth is the footstool of this great God, heaven is His garment. He is in the world, amongst His creatures, as an Oriental king in his tent, amidst his arms and his carpets. If you enter this tent, all vanishes before the idea of the master; you see but him; nothing has an individual and independent existence: these arms are but made for his hands, these carpets for his foot; you imagine them only as spread for him and trodden by him. The awe-inspiring face and the menacing voice of the irresistible lord appear behind his instruments. So far, the Jew, nature, and men are nothing of themselves; they are for the service of God: they have no other reason for existence; no other use: they vanish before the vast and solitary Being who, spread wide and set high as a mountain before human thought, occupies and covers in Himself the whole horizon. Vainly we attempt, we seed of the Aryan race, to figure this devouring God;

[1] The time of which M. Taine speaks, and the translation of Tyndale, precede by at least fifty years the appearance of *Macbeth* (1606). Shakspeare's audience read the present authorised translation.—Tr.

[2] See Lemaistre de Sacy's translation, so slightly biblical.

[3] See Ewald, *Geschichte des Volks Israel*, his apostrophe to the third writer of the Pentateuch, *Erhabener Geist*, etc.

we always leave some beauty, some interest, some part of free existence to nature; we but half attain to the Creator, with difficulty, after a chain of reasoning, like Voltaire and Kant; more readily we make Him into an architect; we naturally believe in natural laws; we know that the order of the world is fixed; we do not crush things and their relations under the feet of an arbitrary sovereignty; we do not grasp the sublime sentiment of Job, who sees the world trembling and swallowed up at the touch of the strong hand; we cannot endure the intense emotion or repeat the marvellous accent of the Psalms, in which, amid the silence of beings reduced to atoms, nothing remains but the heart of man speaking to the eternal Lord. These, in the anguish of a troubled conscience, and the oblivion of sensible nature, renew it in part. If the strong and fierce cheer of the Arab, which breaks forth like the blast of a trumpet at the sight of the rising sun and of the naked solitudes,[1] if the mental trances, the short visions of a luminous and grand landscape, if the Semitic colouring are wanting, at least the seriousness and simplicity have remained; and the Hebraic God brought into the modern conscience, is no less a sovereign in this narrow precinct than in the deserts and mountains from which He sprang. His image is reduced, but His authority is entire; if He is less poetical, He is more moral. Men read with awe and trembling the history of His works, the tables of His law, the archives of His vengeance, the proclamation of His promises and menaces: they are filled with them. Never has a people been seen so deeply imbued by a foreign book, has let it penetrate so far into its manners and writings, its imagination and language. Thenceforth they have found their King, and will follow Him; no word, lay or ecclesiastic, shall prevail over His word; they have submitted their conduct to Him, they will give body and life for Him; and if need be, a day will come when, out of fidelity to Him, they will overthrow the State.

It is not enough to hear this King, they must answer Him; and religion is not complete until the prayer of the people is added to the revelation of God. In 1548, at last, England received her Prayer-book[2] from the hands of Cranmer, Peter Martyr, Bernard Ochin, Melanchthon; the chief and most ardent reformers of Europe were invited to compose a body of doctrines conformable to Scripture, and to express a body of sentiments conformable to the true Christian life,—an admirable book, in which the full spirit of the Reformation breathes out, where, beside the moving tenderness of the gospel, and the manly accents of the Bible, throb the profound emotion, the grave eloquence, the noble-mindedness, the restrained enthusiasm of the heroic and

[1] See Ps. civ. in Luther's admirable translation and in the English translation.

[2] The first Primer of note was in 1545; Froude, v. 141. The Prayer-book underwent several changes in 1552, others under Elizabeth, and a few, lastly, at the Restoration.

poetic souls who had re-discovered Christianity, and had passed near the fire of martyrdom.

'Almighty and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare Thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore Thou them that are penitent; According to Thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for His sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life.'

'Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness.'

The same idea of sin, repentance, and moral renovation continually recurs: the master-thought is always that of the heart humbled before invisible justice, and only imploring His grace in order to obtain His amendment. Such a state of mind ennobles man, and introduces a sort of impassioned gravity in all the important actions of his life. We must hear the liturgy of the deathbed, of baptism, of marriage; the latter first:

'Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy state of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?'

These are genuine words of loyalty and conscience. No mystic languor, here or elsewhere. This religion is not made for women who dream, yearn, and sigh, but for men who examine themselves, act, and have confidence, confidence in some one more just than themselves. When a man is sick, and his flesh is weak, the priest comes to him, and says:

'Dearly beloved, know this, that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness. Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness is, know you certainly, that it is God's visitation. And for what cause soever this sickness is sent unto you; whether it be to try your patience for the example of others, . . . or else it be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father; know you certainly, that if you truly repent you of your sins, and bear your sickness patiently, trusting in God's mercy, . . . submitting yourself wholly unto His will, it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life.'

A great mysterious sentiment, a sort of sublime epic, void of images, shows darkly amid these probings of the conscience; I mean a glimpse

of the divine regulation and of the invisible world, the only existences, the only realities, in spite of bodily appearances and of the brute chance, which seems to jumble all things together. Man sees this beyond at distant intervals, and lifts himself from his mire, as though he had suddenly breathed a pure and strengthening atmosphere. Such are the effects of public prayer restored to the people; for this had been taken from the Latin and rendered into the vulgar tongue: there is a revolution in the word. Doubtless routine, here as with the ancient missal, will insensibly do its sad work: by repeating the same words, man will often do nothing but repeat words; his lips will move whilst his heart remains sluggish. But in great anguish, in the dumb agitations of a restless and hollow spirit, at the funerals of his relatives, the strong words of the book will find him in a mood to feel: for they are living,[1] and do not stay in the ears like dead language: they enter the soul; and as soon as the soul is moved and worked upon, they take root there. If you go and hear them in England itself, and if you listen to the deep and pulsating accent with which they are pronounced, you will see that they constitute there a national poem, always understood and always efficacious. On Sunday, in the silence of business and pleasure, between the bare walls of the village church, where no image, no *ex-voto*, no accessory worship, comes to distract the eyes, the seats are full; the powerful Hebraic verses knock like the strokes of a battering-ram at the door of every soul; then the liturgy unfolds its imposing supplications; and at intervals the song of the congregation, combined with the organ, comes to sustain the people's devotion. There is nothing graver and more simple than public singing; no scales, no elaborate melody: it is not calculated for the gratification of the ear, and yet it is free from the sickly sadness, from the gloomy monotony which the middle-age has left in our chanting; neither monkish nor pagan, it rolls like a manly yet sweet melody, neither contrasting with nor obscuring the words which accompany it: these words are psalms translated into verse, yet lofty; diluted, but not embellished. All is in agreement—place, music, text, ceremony—to set every man, personally and without a mediator, in presence of a just God, and to form a moral poetry which shall sustain and develop the moral sense.[2]

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[1] 'To make use of words in a foreign language, merely with a sentiment of devotion, the mind taking no fruit, could be neither pleasing to God, nor beneficial to man. The party that understood not the pith or effectualness of the talk that he made with God, might be as a harp or pipe, having a sound, but not understanding the noise that itself had made; a Christian man was more than an instrument; and he had therefore provided a determinate form of supplication in the English tongue, that his subjects might be able to pray like reasonable beings in their own language.'—*Letter of Henry* VIII. *to Cranmer.* Froude, iv. 486.

[2] Bishop John Fisher's *Funeral Oration of the Countess of Richmond* (ed. 1711) shows to what practices this religion succeeded. The Countess was the mother of

One detail is still needed to complete this manly religion—human reason. The minister ascends the pulpit and speaks: he speaks coldly, I admit, with literary comments and over-long demonstrations; but solidly, seriously, like a man who desires to convince, and that by worthy means, who addresses only the reason, and discourses only of justice. With Latimer and his contemporaries, preaching, like religion, changes its object and character; like religion, it becomes popular and moral, and appropriate to those who hear it, to recall them to their duties. Few men have deserved better of their fellows, in life and word, than he. He was a genuine Englishman, conscientious, courageous, a man of common sense and good upright practice, sprung from the labouring and independent class, with whom were the heart and thews of the nation. His father, a brave yeoman, had a farm of about four pounds a year, on which he employed half a dozen men, with thirty cows which his wife milked, himself a good soldier of the king,

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Henry VII., and translated the *Myrroure of Golde*, and *The Forthe Boke of the Followinge Jesus Chryst*:—

'As for fastynge, for age, and feebleness, albeit she were not bound, yet those days that by the Church were appointed, she kept them diligently and seriously, and in especial the holy Lent, throughout that she restrained her appetite till one meal of fish on the day; besides her other peculiar fasts of devotion, as St. Anthony, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Catharine, with other; and throughout all the year the Friday and Saturday she full truly observed. As to hard clothes wearing, she had her shirts and girdles of hair, which, when she was in health, every week she failed not certain days to wear, sometime the one, sometime the other, that full often her skin, as I heard say, was pierced therewith.

'In prayer, every day at her uprising, which commonly was not long after five of the clock, she began certain devotions, and so after them, with one of her gentlewomen, the matins of our Lady; which kept her to then, she came into her closet, where then with her chaplain she said also matins of the day; and after that, daily heard four or five masses upon her knees; so continuing in her prayers and devotions unto the hour of dinner, which of the eating day was ten of the clocks, and upon the fasting day eleven. After dinner full truly she would go her stations to three altars daily; daily her dirges and commendations she would say, and her even songs before supper, both of the day and of our Lady, beside many other prayers and psalters of David throughout the year; and at night before she went to bed, she failed not to resort unto her chapel, and there a large quarter of an hour to occupy her devotions. No marvel, though all this long time her kneeling was to her painful, and so painful that many times it caused in her back pain and disease. And yet nevertheless, daily, when she was in health, she failed not to say the crown of our Lady, which, after the manner of Rome, containeth sixty and three aves, and at every ave, to make a kneeling. As for meditation, she had divers books in French, wherewith she would occupy herself when she was weary of prayer. Wherefore divers she did translate out of the French into English. Her marvellous weeping they can bear witness of, which here before have heard her confession, which be divers and many, and at many seasons in the year, lightly every third day. Can also record the same those that were present at any time when she was houshylde, which was full nigh a dozen times every year, what floods of tears there issued forth of her eyes!'

keeping equipment for himself and his horse so as to join the army if need were, training his son to use the bow, making him buckle on his breastplate, and finding a few nobles at the bottom of his purse wherewith to send him to school, and thence to the university.[1] Little Latimer studied eagerly, took his degrees, and continued long a good Catholic, or, as he says, 'in darckense and in the shadow of death.' At about thirty, having often heard Bilney the martyr, and having, moreover, studied the world and thought for himself, he, as he tells us, 'began from that time forward to smell the word of God, and to forsooke the Schoole Doctours, and such fooleries;' presently to preach, and forthwith to pass for a seditious man, very troublesome to the men in authority, who were indifferent to justice. For this was in the first place the salient feature of his eloquence: he spoke to people of their duties, in exact terms. One day, when he preached before the university, the Bishop of Ely came, curious to hear him. Immediately he changed his subject, and drew the portrait of a perfect prelate, a portrait which did not tally well with the bishop's character; and he was denounced for the act. When he was made chaplain of Henry VIII., awe-inspiring as the king was, little as he was himself, he dared to write to him freely to bid him stop the persecution which was set on foot, and to prevent the interdiction of the Bible; verily he risked his life. He had done it before, he did it again; like Tyndale, Knox, all the leaders of the Reformation, he lived in almost ceaseless expectation of death, and in contemplation of the stake. Sick, liable to racking headaches, stomach-aches, pleurisy, stone, he wrought a vast work, travelling, writing, preaching, delivering at the age of sixty-seven two sermons every Sunday, and generally rising at two in the morning, winter and summer, to study. Nothing can be simpler or more effective than his eloquence; and the reason is, that he never speaks for the sake of speaking, but of doing work. His sermons, amongst others those which he preached before the young king Edward VI., are not, like those of Massillon before Louis XV., hung in the air, in the calm region of philosophical amplifications: Latimer wishes to correct and he attacks actual vices, vices which he has seen, which every one can point at with the finger; he too points them out, calls things by their name, and people too, telling facts and details, like a brave heart; and sparing nobody, sets himself without hesitation to denounce and reform iniquity. Universal as his morality is, ancient as is his text, he applies it to the time, to his audience, at times to the judges who are there 'in velvet cotes,' who will not hear the poor, who give but a dog's hearing to such a woman in a twelvemonth, and who leave another poor woman in the Fleet, refusing to accept bail;[2] at times to the king's officers, whose

[1] See note 4, p. 98.

[2] Latimer's *Seven Sermons before Edward* VI., ed. Edward Arber, 1869. Second sermon, pp. 73 and 74.

thefts he enumerates, whom he sets between hell and restitution, and of whom he obtains, nay extorts, pound for pound, the stolen money.[1] Ever from abstract iniquity he proceeds to special abuse; for it is abuse which cries out and demands, not a discourser, but a champion. With him, theology holds but a secondary place; before all, practice: the true offence against God in his eyes is a bad deed; the true service, the suppression of bad deeds. And see by what paths he reaches this. No great word, no show of style, no exhibition of dialectics. He relates his life, the lives of others, giving dates, numbers, places; he abounds in anecdotes, little actual circumstances, fit to enter the imagination and arouse the recollections of each hearer. He is familiar, at times humorous, and always so precise, so impressed with real events and particularities of English life, that we might glean from his sermons an almost complete description of the manners of his age and country. To reprove the great, who appropriate common lands by their enclosures, he details the needs of the peasant, without the least care for conventional proprieties; he is not working now for conventionalities, but to produce convictions:—

'A plough-land must have sheep; yea, they must have sheep to dung their ground for bearing of corn; for if they have no sheep to help to fat the ground, they shall have but bare corn and thin. They must have swine for their food, to make their veneries or bacon of: their bacon is their venison, for they shall now have *hangum tuum*, if they get any other venison; so that bacon is their necessary meat to feed on, which they may not lack. They must have other cattle: as horses to draw their plough, and for carriage of things to the markets; and kine for their milk and cheese, which they must live upon and pay their rents. These cattle must have pasture, which pasture if they lack, the rest must needs fail them: and pasture they cannot have, if the land be taken in, and inclosed from them.'[2]

Another time, to put his hearers on guard against hasty judgments, he relates that, having entered the gaol at Cambridge to exhort the prisoners, he found a woman accused of having killed her infant, who would make no confession:—

'Which denying gave us occasion to search for the matter, and so we did. And at the length we found that her husband loved her not; and therefore he sought means to make her out of the way. The matter was thus: 'a child of hers had been sick by the space of a year, and so decayed as it were in a consumption. At the length it died in harvest-time. She went to her neighbours and other friends to desire their help, to prepare the child to the burial; but there was nobody at home: every man was in the field. The woman, in an heaviness and trouble of spirit, went, and being herself alone, prepared the child to the burial. Her husband coming home, not having great love towards her, accused her of the murder; and so she was taken and brought to Cambridge. But as far forth as I could learn through earnest inquisition, I thought in my conscience the woman was not guilty, all the

[1] Latimer's *Sermons*. Fifth sermon, ed. Arber, p. 147.

[2] Latimer's *Sermons*, ed. Corrie, 1844, 2 vols., *Last Sermon preached before Edward* VI., i. 249.

circumstances well considered. Immediately after this I was called to preach before the king, which was my first sermon that I made before his majesty, and it was done at Windsor; when his majesty, after the sermon was done, did most familiarly talk with me in a gallery. Now, when I saw my time, I kneeled down before his majesty, opening the whole matter; and afterwards most humbly desired his majesty to pardon that woman. For I thought in my conscience she was not guilty; else I would not for all the world sue for a murderer. The king most graciously heard my humble request, insomuch that I had a pardon ready for her at my return homeward. In the mean season that same woman was delivered of a child in the tower at Cambridge, whose godfather I was, and Mistress Cheke was godmother. But all that time I hid my pardon, and told her nothing of it, only exhorting her to confess the truth. At the length the time came when she looked to suffer: I came, as I was wont to do, to instruct her; she made great moan to me, and most earnestly required me that I would find the means that she might be purified before her suffering; for she thought she should have been damned, if she should suffer without purification. . . . So we travailed with this woman till we brought her to a good trade; and at the length shewed her the king's pardon, and let her go.

'This tale I told you by this occasion, that though some women be very unnatural, and forget their children, yet when we hear anybody so report, we should not be too hasty in believing the tale, but rather suspend our judgments till we know the truth.'[1]

When a man preaches thus, he is believed: we are sure that he is not reciting a lesson; we feel that he has seen, that he draws his moral not from books, but from facts; that his counsels come from the solid basis whence everything ought to come,—I mean from manifold and personal experience. Many a time I have listened to popular orators, who address the pocket, and prove their talent by the money they have collected: it is thus that they hold forth, with circumstantial, recent, proximate examples, with conversational turns of language, setting aside great arguments and fine language. Imagine the ascendency of the Scriptures enlarged upon in such words; to what strata of the people it could descend, what a hold it had upon sailors, workmen, domestics! Consider, again, how the authority of these words is doubled by the courage, independence, integrity, unassailable and recognised virtue of him who utters them. He spoke the truth to the king, unmasked robbers, incurred all kind of hate, resigned his see rather than sign anything against his conscience; and at eighty years, under Mary, refusing to retract, after two years of prison and waiting—and what waiting!—he was led to the stake. His companion, Ridley, slept the night before as calmly, we are told, as ever he did in his life; and when ready to be chained to the post, said aloud, 'O heavenly Father, I give Thee most hearty thanks, for that Thou hast called me to be a professor of Thee, even unto death.' Latimer in his turn, when they brought the lighted faggots, cried, 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in

[1] Latimer's *Sermons*, ed. Corrie, *First Sermon on the Lord's Prayer*, i. 335.

England, as I trust shall never be put out.' He then bathed his hands in the flames, and resigning his soul to God, expired.

He had judged rightly: it is by this supreme proof that a creed proves its power and gains its adherents; martyrdoms are a sort of propaganda as well as a witness, and make converts whilst they make martyrs. All the writings of the time, and all the commentaries which may be added to them, are weak beside actions which, one after the other, shone forth at that time from doctors and from people, down to the most simple and ignorant. In three years, under Mary, nearly three hundred persons, men, women, old and young, some all but children, let themselves be burned alive rather than abjure. The all-powerful idea of God, and of the fidelity due to Him, made them strong against all the revulsions of nature, and all the trembling of the flesh. 'No one will be crowned,' said one of them, 'but they who fight like men; and he who endures to the end shall be saved.' Doctor Rogers suffered first, in presence of his wife and ten children, one at the breast. He had not been told beforehand, and was sleeping soundly. The wife of the keeper of Newgate woke him, and told him that he must burn that day. 'Then,' said he, 'I need not truss my points.' In the midst of the flames he did not seem to suffer. 'His children stood by consoling him, in such a way that he looked as if they were conducting him to a merry marriage.'[1] A young man of nineteen, William Hunter, apprenticed to a silk-weaver, was exhorted by his parents to persevere to the end:—

'In the mean time William's father and mother came to him, and desired heartily of God that he might continue to the end in that good way which he had begun: and his mother said to him, that she was glad that ever she was so happy to bear such a child, which could find in his heart to lose his life for Christ's name's sake.

'Then William said to his mother, "For my little pain which I shall suffer, which is but a short braid, Christ hath promised me, mother (said he), a crown of joy: may you not be glad of that, mother?" With that his mother kneeled down on her knees, saying, "I pray God strengthen thee, my son, to the end; yea, I think thee as well-bestowed as any child that ever I bare." . . .

'Then William Hunter plucked up his gown, and stepped over the parlour groundsel, and went forward cheerfully; the sheriff's servant taking him by one arm, and I his brother by another. And thus going in the way, he met with his father according to his dream, and he spake to his son weeping, and saying, "God be with thee, son William;" and William said, "God be with you, good father, and be of good comfort; for I hope we shall meet again, when we shall be merry." His father said, "I hope so, William;" and so departed. So William went to the place where the stake stood, even according to his dream, where all things were very unready. Then William took a wet broom-faggot, and kneeled down

[1] Noailles, the French (and Catholic) Ambassador. *Pict. Hist.* ii. 523. John Fox, *History of the Acts and Monuments of the Church*, ed. Townsend, 1843, 8 vols., vi. 612, says: 'His wife and children, being eleven in number, and ten able to go, and one sucking on her breast, met him by the way as he went towards Smithfield.'—TR.

thereon, and read the fifty-first Psalm, till he came to these words, "The sacrifice of God is a contrite spirit; a contrite and a broken heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." . . .

'Then said the sheriff, "Here is a letter from the queen. If thou wilt recant thou shalt live; if not, thou shalt be burned." "No," quoth William, "I will not recant, God willing." Then William rose and went to the stake, and stood upright to it. Then came one Richard Ponde, a bailiff, and made fast the chain about William.

'Then said master Brown, "Here is not wood enough to burn a leg of him." Then said William, "Good people! pray for me; and make speed and despatch quickly: and pray for me while you see me alive, good people! and I will pray for you likewise." "Now?" quoth master Brown, "pray for thee! I will pray no more for thee, than I will pray for a dog." . . .

'Then was there a gentleman which said, "I pray God have mercy upon his soul." The people said, "Amen, Amen."'

'Immediately fire was made. Then William cast his psalter right into his brother's hand, who said, "William! think on the holy passion of Christ, and be not afraid of death." And William answered, "I am not afraid." Then lift he up his hands to heaven, and said, "Lord, Lord, Lord, receive my spirit;" and, casting down his head again into the smothering smoke, he yielded up his life for the truth, sealing it with his blood to the praise of God.'[1]

When a passion is able thus to tame the natural affections, it is able also to tame bodily pain; all the ferocity of the time laboured in vain against convictions. Thomas Tomkins, a weaver of Shoreditch, being asked by Bonner if he could stand the fire well, bade him try it. 'Bonner took Tomkins by the fingers, and held his hand directly over the flame,' to terrify him. But 'he never shrank, till the veins shrank and the sinews burst, and the water (blood) did spirt in Mr. Harpsfield's face.'[2] 'In the isle of Guernsey, a woman with child being ordered to the fire, was delivered in the flames, and the infant being taken from her, was ordered by the magistrates to be thrown back into the fire.'[3] Bishop Hooper was burned three times over in a small fire of green wood. There was too little wood, and the wind turned aside the smoke. He cried out, 'For God's love, good people, let me have more fire.' His legs and thighs were roasted; one of his hands fell off before he expired; he endured thus three-quarters of an hour; before him in a box was his pardon, on condition that he would retract. Against long sufferings in poisonous prisons, against everything which might unnerve or seduce, these men were invincible: five died of hunger at Canterbury; they were in irons night and day, with no covering but their clothes, on rotten straw; yet there was an understanding amongst them, that the 'cross of persecution' was a blessing from God, 'an inestimable jewel, a sovereign antidote, well-approved, to cure love of self and earthly affection.' Before such examples the people were shaken. A woman wrote to Bishop Bonner, that there was not a child but called him

[1] Fox, *History of the Acts*, etc., vi. 727.
[2] *Ibid.* vi. 719.
[3] Neal, *History of the Puritans*, ed. Toulmin, 5 vols., 1793, i. 96.

Bonner the hangman, and knew on his fingers, as well as he knew his Pater, the exact number of those he had burned at the stake, or suffered to die of hunger in prison these nine months. 'You have lost the hearts of twenty thousand persons who were inveterate Papists a year ago.' The spectators encouraged the martyrs, and cried out to them that their cause was just. The Catholic envoy Renard wrote to Charles v. that it was said that several had desired to take their place at the stake, by the side of those who were being burned. In vain the queen had forbidden, on pain of death, all marks of approbation. 'We know that they are men of God,' cried one of the spectators; 'that is why we cannot help saying, God strengthen them.' And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen.' What wonder if, at the coming of Elizabeth, England cast in her lot with Protestantism? The threats of the Armada urged her further in advance; and the Reformation became national under the pressure of foreign hostility, as it had become popular through the triumph of its martyrs.

IV.

Two distinct branches receive the common sap,—one above, the other beneath: one respected, flourishing, shooting forth in the open air; the other despised, half buried in the ground, trodden under foot by those who would crush it: both living, the Anglican as well as the Puritan, the one in spite of the effort made to destroy it, the other in spite of the care taken to develop it.

The court has its religion, like the country—a sincere and winning religion. Amid the pagan poesies which up to the Revolution always had the ear of the world, we find gradually piercing through and rising higher the grave and grand idea which sent its roots to the depth of the public mind. Many poets, Drayton, Davies, Cowley, Giles Fletcher, Quarles, Crashaw, wrote sacred histories, pious or moral verses, noble stanzas on death and the immortality of the soul, on the frailty of things human, and on the supreme providence in which alone man finds the support of his weakness and the consolation of his sufferings. In the greatest prose writers, Bacon, Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Raleigh, we see the fruits of veneration, a settled belief in the obscure beyond; in short, faith and prayer. Several prayers written by Bacon are amongst the finest known; and the courtier Raleigh, whilst writing of the fall of empires, and how the barbarous nations had destroyed this grand and magnificent Roman Empire, ended his book with the ideas and tone of a Bossuet.[1] Picture Saint Paul's in London, and the

[1] 'O eloquent, just, and mightie Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised: thou hast drawne together all the farre stretched greatnesse, all the pride, crueltie, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet.*'

fashionable people who used to meet there; the gentlemen who noisily made the rowels of their spurs resound on entering, looked around and carried on conversation during service, who swore by God's eyes, God's eyelids, who amongst the columns and chapels showed off their beribboned shoes, their chains, scarves, satin doublets, velvet cloaks, their braggadocio manners and stage attitudes. All this was very free, very loose, very far from our modern decency. But pass over youthful bluster; take man in his great moments, in prison, in danger, or indeed when old age arrives, when he has come to judge of life; take him, above all, in the country, on his estate far from any town, in the church of the village where he is lord; or again, when he is alone in the evening, at his table, listening to the prayer offered up by his chaplain, having no books but some great folio of dramas, well dog's-eared by his pages, and his Prayer-book and Bible; you may then understand how the new religion tightens its hold on these imaginative and serious minds. It does not shock them by a narrow rigour; it does not fetter the flight of their mind; it does not attempt to extinguish the buoyant flame of their fancy; it does not proscribe the beautiful: it preserves more than any reformed church the noble pomp of the ancient worship, and rolls under the domes of its cathedrals, the rich modulations, the majestic harmonies of its grave, organ-led music. It is its characteristic not to be in opposition to the world, but, on the other hand, to draw it nearer to itself, by bringing itself nearer to it. By its secular condition as well as by its external worship, it is embraced by and it embraces it: its head is the Queen, it is a part of the Constitution, it sends its dignitaries to the House of Lords; it suffers its priests to marry; its benefices are in the nomination of the great families; its chief members are the younger sons of these same families: by all these channels it imbibes the spirit of the age. In its hands, too, reformation cannot become hostile to science, poetry, the large ideas of the Renaissance. Nay, in the nobles of Elizabeth and James I., as in the cavaliers of Charles I., it tolerates artistic tastes, philosophical curiosity, the fashions of society, and the sentiment of the beautiful. The alliance is so strong, that, under Cromwell, the ecclesiastics in a mass were dismissed for their king's sake, and the cavaliers died wholesale for the Church. The two societies mutually touch and are confounded together. If several poets are pious, several ecclesiastics are poetical,—Bishop Hall, Bishop Corbet, Wither a rector, and the preacher Donne. If several laymen rise to religious contemplations, several theologians, Hooker, John Hales, Taylor, Chillingworth, set philosophy and reason by the side of dogma. Accordingly we find a new literature arising, elevated and original, eloquent and measured, armed at once against the Puritans, who sacrifice freedom of intellect to the tyranny of the letter, and against the Catholics, who sacrifice independence of criticism to the tyranny of tradition; opposed equally to the servility of literal interpretation and the servility of a prescribed interpretation. In front of all appears

the learned and excellent Hooker, one of the sweetest and most conciliatory of men, the most solid and persuasive of logicians, a comprehensive mind, who in every question remote from the principles [1] introduces into controversy general conceptions, and the knowledge of human nature; [2] beyond this, a methodical writer, correct and always ample, worthy of being regarded not only as one of the fathers of the English Church, but as one of the founders of English prose. With a sustained gravity and simplicity, he shows the Puritans that the laws of nature, reason, and society, like the law of Scripture, are of divine institution, that all are equally worthy of respect and obedience, that we must not sacrifice the inner word, by which God reaches our intellect, to the outer word, by which God reaches our senses; that thus the civil constitution of the Church, and the visible ordinance of ceremonies, may be conformable to the will of God, even when they are not justified by a clear text of Scripture; and that the authority of the magistrates, as well as the reason of man, does not exceed its rights in establishing certain uniformities and disciplines on which Scripture is silent, in order that reason may decide:—

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[1] Hooker's Works, ed. Keble, 1836, 3 vols., *The Ecclesiastical Polity*.

[2] *Ibid.* i. book i. 249, 258, 312:—

'That which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the form and measure, of working, the same we term a Law. . . .

'Now if nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether though it were but for awhile, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions, . . . if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness, begin to stand and to rest himself: . . . what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world? . . .

'Between men and beasts there is no possibility of sociable communion, because the well-spring of that communion is a natural delight which man hath to transfuse from himself into others, and to receive from others into himself especially those things wherein the excellency of his kind doth most consist. The chiefest instrument of human communion therefore is speech, because thereby we impart mutually one to another the conceits of our reasonable understanding. And for that cause seeing beasts are not hereof capable, forasmuch as with them we can use no such conference, they being in degree, although above other creatures on earth to whom nature hath denied sense, yet lower than to be sociable companions of man to whom nature hath given reason; it is of Adam said, that amongst the beasts "he found not for himself any meet companion." Civil society doth more content the nature of man than any private kind of solitary living, because in society this good of mutual participation is so much larger than otherwise. Herewith notwithstanding we are not satisfied, but we covet (if it might be) to have a kind of society and fellowship even with all mankind.'

'For if the natural strength of man's wit may by experience and study attain unto such ripeness in the knowledge of things human, that men in this respect may presume to build somewhat upon their judgment; what reason have we to think but that even in matters divine, the like wits furnished with necessary helps, exercised in Scripture with like diligence, and assisted with the grace of Almighty God, may grow unto so much perfection of knowledge, that men shall have just cause, when anything pertinent unto faith and religion is doubted of, the more willingly to incline their minds towards that which the sentence of so grave, wise, and learned in that faculty shall judge most sound.'[1]

This 'natural light' therefore must not be despised, but rather nourished so as to augment the other,[2] as we put torch to torch; above all, nourished that we may live in harmony with each other.

'Far more comfort it were for us (so small is the joy we take in these strifes) to labour under the same yoke, as men that look for the same eternal reward of their labours, to be conjoined with you in bands of indissoluble love and amity, to live as if our persons being many, our souls were but one, rather than in such dismembered sort to spend our few and wretched days in a tedious prosecuting of wearisome contentions.'

In fact, it is in such amity that the greatest theologians conclude: they quit an oppressive practice to grasp a liberal spirit. If by its political structure the English Church is persecuting, by its doctrinal structure it is tolerant; it needs the reason of the laity too much to refuse it liberty; it lives in a world too cultivated and thoughtful to proscribe thought and culture. John Hales, its most eminent doctor, declared several times that he would renounce the Church of England to-morrow, if she insisted on the doctrine that other Christians would be damned; and that men believe other people to be damned only when they desire them to be so.[3] It was he again, a theologian, a prebendary, who advises men to trust to themselves alone in religious matters; to leave nothing for authority, or antiquity, or the majority; to use their own reason in believing, as they use 'their own legs in walking;' to act and be men in mind as well as in the rest; and to regard as cowardly and impious the borrowing of doctrine and sloth of thought. So Chillingworth, a notably militant and loyal mind, the most exact, the most penetrating, and the most convincing of controversialists, first Protestant, then Catholic, then Protestant again and for ever, has the courage to say that these great changes, wrought in himself and by himself, through study and research, are, of all his actions, those which satisfy him most. He maintains that reason applied to Scripture alone ought to persuade men; that authority has no claim in it; 'that

[1] *Ecc. Pol.* i. book ii. ch. vii. 4, p. 405.

[2] See the *Dialogues of Galileo*. The same idea which is persecuted by the church at Rome is at the same time defended by the church in England. See also *Ecc. Pol.* i. book iii. 461–481.

[3] Clarendon's witness. See the same doctrines in Jeremy Taylor, *Liberty of Prophesying*, 1647.

nothing is more against religion than to force religion;' that the great principle of the Reformation is liberty of conscience; and that if the doctrines of the different Protestant sects are not absolutely true, at least they are free from all impiety and from all error damnable in itself, or destructive of salvation. Thus is developed a new school of polemics, a theology, a solid and rational apologetics, rigorous in its arguments, capable of expansion, confirmed by science, and which, authorizing independence of personal judgment at the same time with the intervention of the natural reason, leaves religion in amity with the world and the establishments of the past.

A writer of genius appears amongst these, a prose-poet, gifted with imagination like Spenser and Shakspeare,—Jeremy Taylor, who, from the bent of his mind as well as from circumstances, was destined to present the alliance of the Renaissance with the Reformation, and to carry into the pulpit the ornate style of the court. A preacher at St. Paul's, appreciated and admired by men of fashion 'for his youthful and fresh beauty and his graceful bearing,' as also for his splendid diction; patronised and promoted by Archbishop Laud, he wrote for the king a defence of episcopacy; became chaplain to the king's army; was taken, ruined, twice imprisoned by the Parliamentarians; married a natural daughter of Charles I.; then, after the Restoration, was loaded with honours; became bishop, member of the Privy Council, and chancellor of the Irish university: in every passage of his life, fortunate or otherwise, private or public, we see that he is an Anglican, a royalist, imbued with the spirit of the cavaliers and courtiers, not with their vices. On the contrary, there was never a better or more upright man, more zealous in his duties, more tolerant by principle; so that, preserving a Christian gravity and purity, he received from the Renaissance only its rich imagination, its classical erudition, and its liberal spirit. But he had these gifts entire, as they existed in the most brilliant and original of the men of the world, in Sir Philip Sidney, Lord Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, with the graces, splendours, refinements which are characteristic of these sensitive and creative geniuses, and yet with the redundancies, singularities, incongruities inevitable in an age when excess of transport prevented the soundness of taste. Like all these writers, like Montaigne, he was imbued with the classic antiquity; in the pulpit he quotes Greek and Latin anecdotes, passages from Seneca, verses of Lucretius and Euripides, and this side by side with texts from the Bible, from the Gospels and the Fathers. Cant was not yet in vogue; the two great sources of teaching, Christian and Pagan, ran side by side; they were collected in the same vessel, without imagining that the wisdom of reason and nature could mar the wisdom of faith and revelation. Fancy these strange sermons, in which the two eruditions, Hellenic and Evangelic, flow together with their texts, and each text in its own language; in which, to prove that fathers are often unfortunate in their children, the author brings forward one after the other,

Chabrias, Germanicus, Marcus Aurelius, Hortensius, Quintus Fabius Maximus, Scipio Africanus, Moses and Samuel; where in the form of comparisons and illustrations is heaped up the spoil of histories and authorities on botany, astronomy, zoology, which the cyclopædias and scientific fancies at that time spread before the mind. Taylor will relate to you the history of the bears of Pannonia, which, when wounded, will press the iron deeper home; or of the apples of Sodom, which are beautiful to the gaze, but full within of rottenness and worms; and many others of the same kind. For it was a characteristic of men of this age and school, not to possess a mind swept, levelled, regulated, laid out in straight paths, like our seventeenth century writers, and like the gardens at Versailles, but full, and crowded with circumstantial facts, complete dramatic scenes, little coloured pictures, pell-mell and badly dusted; so that, lost in confusion and dust, the modern spectator cries out at their pedantry and coarseness. Metaphors multiply one above the other, jumbled, blocking each other's path, as in Shakspeare. We think to follow one, and a second begins, then a third cutting into the second, and so on, flower after flower, firework after firework, so that the brightness becomes misty with sparks, and the sight ends in a haze. On the other hand, and just by virtue of this same turn of mind, Taylor imagines objects, not vaguely and feebly, by some indistinct general conception, but precisely, entire, as they are, with their sensible colour, their proper form, the multitude of true and particular details which distinguish them in their species. He is not acquainted with them by hearsay; he has seen them. Better, he sees them now, and makes them to be seen. Read this piece, and say if it does not seem to have been copied from a hospital, or from the field of battle:—

'And what can we complain of the weakness of our strengths, or the pressures of diseases, when we see a poor soldier stand in a breach almost starved with cold and hunger, and his cold apt to be relieved only by the heats of anger, a fever, or a fired musket, and his hunger slacked by a greater pain and a huge fear? This man shall stand in his arms and wounds, *patiens luminis atque solis*, pale and faint, weary and watchful; and at night shall have a bullet pulled out of his flesh, and shivers from his bones, and endure his mouth to be sewed up from a violent rent to its own dimensions; and all this for a man whom he never saw, or, if he did, was not noted by him; but one that shall condemn him to the gallows if he runs away from all this misery.'[1]

This is the advantage of a full imagination over ordinary reason. It produces in a mass twenty or thirty ideas, and as many images, exhausting the subject which the other only outlines and sketches. There are a thousand circumstances and shades in every event; and they are all grasped in living words like these:—

'For so have I seen the little purls of a spring sweat through the bottom of a

[1] Jeremy Taylor's Works, ed. Eden, 1840, 10 vols., *Holy Dying*, ch. iii. sec. 4, § 3, p. 315.

bank, and intenerate the stubborn pavement, till it hath made it fit for the impression of a child's foot; and it was despised, like the descending pearls of a misty morning, till it had opened its way and made a stream large enough to carry away the ruins of the undermined strand, and to invade the neighbouring gardens; but then the despised drops were grown into an artificial river, and an intolerable mischief. So are the first entrances of sin, stopped with the antidotes of a hearty prayer, and checked into sobriety by the eye of a reverend man, or the counsels of a single sermon; but when such beginnings are neglected, and our religion hath not in it so much philosophy as to think anything evil as long as we can endure it, they grow up to ulcers and pestilential evils; they destroy the soul by their abode, who at their first entry might have been killed with the pressure of a little finger.'[1]

All extremes meet in that imagination. The cavaliers who heard him, found, as in Ford, Beaumont, and Fletcher, the crude copy of the most coarse and unclean truth, and the light music of the most graceful and airy fancies; the smell and horrors of a dissecting room,[2] and all on a sudden the freshness and cheerfulness of a smiling dawn; the hateful detail of a leprosy, its white spots, its inner rottenness; and then this lovely picture of a lark, rising amid the early perfumes of the fields:—

'For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest, than it could recover by the vibration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over; and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing, as if it had learned music and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through the air, about his ministries here below. So is the prayer of a good man.'[3]

And he continues with the charm, sometimes with the very words, of Shakspeare. In the preacher, as well as in the poet, as well as in all the cavaliers and all the artists of the time, the imagination is so full, that it reaches the real, even to its filth, and the ideal as far as its heaven.

How could true religious sentiment thus accommodate itself to such a frank and worldly gait? This, however, is what it has done; and more —the latter has generated the former. With Taylor, as well as with the others, a free poetry leads to profound faith. If this alliance astonishes us to-day, it is because in this respect people have grown pedantic. We take the precise man for a religious man. We are content to see him stiff in his black coat, choked in a white cravat, with a prayer-book in his hand. We confound piety with decency, propriety, permanent and perfect regularity. We proscribe to a man of faith all candid speech, all bold gesture, all fire and dash in word or act; we are shocked by Luther's rude words, the bursts of laughter which shook his mighty

[1] Sermon xvi., *Of Growth in Sin.*

[2] 'We have already opened up this dunghill covered with snow, which was indeed on the outside white as the spots of leprosy.'

[3] *Golden Grove Sermons:* V. 'The Return of Prayers.'

paunch, his workaday rages, his plain and free speaking, the audacious familiarity with which he treats Christ and the Deity.[1] We do not remember that these freedoms and this recklessness are simply signs of entire belief, that warm and immoderate conviction is too sure of itself to be tied down to an irreproachable style, that primitive religion consists not of punctilios, but of emotions. It is a poem, the greatest of all, a poem believed in; this is why these men found it on the borders of their poesy: the way of looking at the world, adopted by Shakspeare and all the tragic poets, led to it; another step, and Jacques, Hamlet, would be there. That vast obscurity, that black unexplored ocean, 'the unknown country,' which they saw on the verge of our sad life, who knows whether it is not bounded by another shore? The troubled notion of the shadowy beyond is national, and this is why the national renaissance at this time became Christian. When Taylor speaks of death, he only takes up and works out a thought which Shakspeare had already sketched:—

'All the succession of time, all the changes in nature, all the varieties of light and darkness, the thousand thousands of accidents in the world, and every contingency to every man, and to every creature, doth preach our funeral sermon, and calls us to look and see how the old sexton Time throws up the earth, and digs a grave where we must lay our sins or our sorrows, and sow our bodies, till they rise again in a fair or in an intolerable eternity.'

For beside this final death, which swallows us whole, there are partial deaths which devour us piece by piece:—

'Every revolution which the sun makes about the world, divides between life and death; and death possesses both those portions by the next morrow; and we are dead to all those months which we have already lived, and we shall never live them over again: and still God makes little periods of our age. ... First we change our world, when we come from the womb to feel the warmth of the sun. Then we sleep and enter into the image of death, in which state we are unconcerned in all the changes of the world: and if our mothers or our nurses die, or a wild boar destroy our vineyards, or our king be sick, we regard it not, but during that state are as disinterest as if our eyes were closed with the clay that weeps in the bowels of the earth. At the end of seven years our teeth fall and die before us, representing a formal prologue to the tragedy; and still every seven years it is odds but we shall finish the last scene: and when nature, or chance, or vice, takes our body in pieces, weakening some parts and loosing others, we taste the grave and the solemnities of our own funerals, first in those parts that ministered to vice, and next in them that served for ornament, and in a short time even they that served for necessity become useless, and entangled like the wheels of a broken clock. Baldness is but a dressing to our funerals, the proper ornament of mourning, and of a person entered very far into the regions and possession of death: and we have

[1] Luther's *Table Talk*, ed. Hazlitt, No. 187, p. 30: When Jesus Christ was born, he doubtless cried and wept like other children, and his mother tended him as other mothers tend their children. As he grew up he was submissive to his parents, and waited on them, and carried his supposed father's dinner to him; and when he came back, Mary no doubt often said, 'My dear little Jesus, where hast thou been?'

many more of the same signification; gray hairs, rotten teeth, dim eyes, trembling joints, short breath, stiff limbs, wrinkled skin, short memory, decayed appetite. Every day's necessity calls for a reparation of that portion which death fed on all night, when we lay in his lap, and slept in his outer chambers. The very spirits of a man prey upon the daily portion of bread and flesh, and every meal is a rescue from one death, and lays up for another; and while we think a thought, we die; and the clock strikes, and reckons on our portion of eternity: we form our words with the breath of our nostrils, we have the less to live upon for every word we speak.'[1]

Beyond all these destructions, other destructions are at work; chance mows us down as well as nature, and we are the prey of accident as of necessity:—

'Thus nature calls us to meditate of death by those things which are the instruments of acting it: and God by all the variety of His providence makes us see death everywhere, in all variety of circumstances, and dressed up for all the fancies, and the expectation of every single person.[2] . . . And how many teeming mothers have rejoiced over their swelling wombs, and pleased themselves in becoming the channels of blessing to a family, and the midwife hath quickly bound their heads and feet, and carried them forth to burial?[3] . . . You can go no whither but you tread upon a dead man's bones.'[4]

Thus these powerful words roll on, sublime as an organ motett; this universal crushing out of human vanities has the funeral grandeur of a tragedy; piety in this instance proceeds from eloquence, and genius leads to faith. All the powers and all the tenderness of the soul are moved. It is not a cold rigorist who speaks; it is a man, a moved man, with senses and a heart, who has become a Christian not by mortification, but by the development of his whole being:—

'Reckon but from the sprightfulness of youth, and the fair cheeks and full eyes of childhood, from the vigorousness and strong flexure of the joints of five-and-twenty, to the hollowness and dead paleness, to the loathsomeness and horror of a three days' burial, and we shall perceive the distance to be very great and very strange. But so have I seen a rose newly springing from the clefts of its hood, and at first it was fair as the morning, and full with the dew of heaven as a lamb's fleece; but when a ruder breath had forced open its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe retirements, it began to put on darkness, and to decline to softness and the symptoms of a sickly age; it bowed the head, and broke its stalk, and at night having lost some of its leaves and all its beauty, it fell into the portion of weeds and outworn faces. The same is the portion of every man and every woman, the heritage of worms and serpents, rottenness and cold dishonour, and our beauty so changed, that our acquaintance quickly knew us not; and that change mingled with so much horror, or else meets so with our fears and weak discoursings, that they who six hours ago tended upon us either with charitable or ambitious services, cannot without some regret stay in the room alone where the body lies stripped of its life and honour. I have read of a fair young German gentleman who living often refused to be pictured, but put off the importunity of his friends' desire by giving way that after a few days' burial they might send a

[1] *Holy Dying*, ed. Eden, ch. i. sec. i. p. 267.
[2] *Ibid.* 267. [3] *Ibid.* 268. [4] *Ibid.* 269.

painter to his vault, and if they saw cause for it draw the image of his death unto the life: they did so, and found his face half eaten, and his midriff and backbone full of serpents; and so he stands pictured among his armed ancestors. So does the fairest beauty change, and it will be as bad with you as me; and then what servants shall we have to wait upon us in the grave? what friends to visit us? what officious people to cleanse away the moist and unwholesome cloud reflected upon our faces from the sides of the weeping vaults, which are the longest weepers for our funeral?'[1]

Brought hither, like Hamlet to the burying-ground, amid the skulls which he recognises, and under the oppression of the death which he touches, man needs but a slight effort to see a new world arise in his heart. He seeks the remedy of his sadness in the idea of eternal justice, and implores it with a breadth of words which makes the prayer a hymn in prose, as beautiful as a work of art:—

'Eternal God, Almighty Father of men and angels, by whose care and providence I am preserved and blessed, comforted and assisted, I humbly beg of Thee to pardon the sins and follies of this day, the weakness of my services, and the strengths of my passions, the rashness of my words, and the vanity and evil of my actions. O just and dear God, how long shall I confess my sins, and pray against them, and yet fall under them? O let it be so no more; let me never return to the follies of which I am ashamed, which bring sorrow and death, and Thy displeasure, worse than death. Give me a command over my inclinations and a perfect hatred of sin, and a love to Thee above all the desires of this world. Be pleased to bless and preserve me this night from all sin and all violence of chance, and the malice of the spirits of darkness: watch over me in my sleep; and whether I sleep or wake, let me be Thy servant. Be Thou first and last in all my thoughts, and the guide and continual assistance of all my actions. Preserve my body, pardon the sin of my soul, and sanctify my spirit. Let me always live holily and soberly; and when I die, receive my soul into Thy hands.'[2]

V.

This was, however, but an imperfect Reformation, and the official religion was too closely bound up with the world to undertake to cleanse it thoroughly: if it repressed the excesses of vice, it did not attack its source; and the paganism of the Renaissance, following its bent, already under James I. issued in the corruption, orgie, mincing, and drunken habits, appetising and gross sensuality,[3] which subsequently under the Restoration stank like a sewer in the sun. But underneath the established Protestantism was propagated the interdicted Protestantism: the yeomen were settling their faith like the gentlemen, and already the Puritans made headway under the Anglicans.

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[1] *Holy Dying*, ch. i. sec. ii. p. 270. [2] *The Golden Grove.*

[3] See in *Thierry and Theodoret*, by Beaumont and Fletcher, the characters of Bawder, Protalyce, and Brunhalt. In *The Custom of the Country*, by the same authors, several scenes represent the inside of an infamous house,—a frequent thing, by the way, in the dramas of that time; but here the boarders in the house are men. See also *Rule a Wife and have a Wife*, by the same authors.

No culture here, no philosophy, no sentiment of harmonious and pagan beauty. Conscience only spoke, and its restlessness had become a terror. The son of the shopkeeper, of the farmer, who read the Bible in the barn or the counting-house, amid the barrels or the wool-bags, did not take matters as the fine cavalier bred up in the old mythology, and refined by an elegant Italian education. They took them tragically, sternly examined themselves, pricked their hearts with their scruples, filled their imaginations with the vengeance of God and the terrors of the Bible. A gloomy epic, terrible and grand as the *Edda*, was fermenting in their melancholy imaginations. They steeped themselves in texts of Saint Paul, in the thundering menaces of the prophets; they burdened their minds with the pitiless doctrines of Calvin; they admitted that the majority of men were predestined to eternal damnation:[1] many believed that this multitude were criminal before their birth; that God willed, foresaw, provided for their ruin; that He designed their punishment from all eternity; that He created them simply to give them up to it.[2] Nothing but grace can save the wretched creature, free grace, God's sheer favour, which He only gives to a few, and which He grants not to the struggles and works of men, but after the arbitrary choice of His single and absolute will. We are 'children of wrath,' plague-stricken, and condemned from our birth; and wherever we look in all the expanse of heaven, we find but thunderbolts to deafen and destroy us. Fancy, if you can, the effects of such an idea on the solitary and morose spirits, such as this race and climate generates. Some would fancy themselves damned, and went groaning about the streets; others never slept. They were beside themselves, always imagining that they felt the hand of God or the claw of the devil upon them. An extraordinary power, immense means of action, were suddenly opened up in the soul, and there was no barrier in the moral life, and no establishment in civil society which their efforts could not upset.

At once, private life was transformed. How should ordinary sentiments, natural and every-day notions of happiness and pleasure, subsist before such a conception? Suppose men condemned to death, not ordinary death, but the rack, torture, an infinitely horrible and infinitely extended torment, waiting for their sentence, and yet knowing that they had one chance in a thousand, in a hundred thousand, of pardon; could they still go on amusing themselves, taking an interest in the business or pleasure of the time? The azure heaven shines not for them, the sun warms them not, the beauty and sweetness of things have no attraction for them; they have lost the wont of laughter; they fasten inwardly, pale and silent, on their anguish and their expectation; they have but one thought: 'Will the judge pardon me?' They anxiously

[1] Calvin, quoted by Haag, ii. 216, *Histoire des Dogmes Chrétiens.*

[2] These were the Supralapsarians.

probe the involuntary motions of their heart, which alone can reply, and the inner revelation, which alone can render them certain of pardon or ruin. They think that any other condition of mind is unholy, that recklessness and joy are monstrous, that every worldly distraction or interest is an act of godlessness, and that the true mark of a Christian is a terror at the very idea of salvation. Thenceforth rigour and rigidity mark their manners. The Puritan condemns the stage, the assemblies, the world's pomps and gatherings, the court's gallantry and elegance, the poetical and symbolical festivals of the country, the May-days, the merry feasts, bell-ringings, all the outlets by which sensual or instinctive nature had essayed to relieve itself. He gives them up, abandons recreations and ornaments, crops his hair, wears a simple sombre-hued coat, speaks through his nose, walks stiffly, with his eyes in the air, absorbed, indifferent to visible things. The external and natural man is abolished; only the inner and spiritual man survives; there remains of the soul only the ideas of God and conscience,—a conscience alarmed and diseased, but strict in every duty, attentive to the least requirements, disdaining the equivocations of worldly morality, inexhaustible in patience, courage, sacrifice, enthroning purity on the domestic hearth, truth in the tribunal, probity in the counting-house, labour in the workshop, above all, a fixed determination to bear all and do all rather than fail in the least injunction of moral justice and Bible-law. The stoical energy, a fundamental honesty of the race, were aroused at the appeal of an enthusiastic imagination; and these unbending characteristics were displayed in their entirety in conjunction with abnegation and virtue.

Another step, and this great movement passed from within to without, from individual manners to public institutions. Observe these people in their reading of the Bible, they apply to themselves the commands imposed on the Jews, and the prologues urge them to it. At the outset of their Bibles the translator[1] set a table of the principal words in Scripture, each with its definition and texts to support it. They read and weigh these words: '*Abomination* before God are Idoles, Images. Before whom the people do bow them selfes.' Is this precept observed? No doubt the images are taken away, but the queen has still a crucifix in her chapel, and is it not a remnant of idolatry to kneel down before the sacrament? '*Abrogacion*, that is to abolyshe, or to make of none effecte: And so the lawe of the commandementes whiche was in the decrees and ceremonies, is abolished. The sacrifices, festes, meates, and al outwarde ceremonies are abrogated, and all the order of priesthode is abrogated.' Is this so, and how does it happen that the bishops still take upon themselves the right of prescribing faith, worship, and of tyrannising over Christian consciences? And have they not pre-

[1] *The Byble, nowe lately with greate industry and Diligẽce recognised* (by Edm. Becke), Lond., by John Daye and William Seres, 1549, with Tyndale's *Prologues*.

served in the organ-music, in the surplice of the priests, in the sign of the cross, in a hundred other practices, all these visible rites which God has declared profane? '*Abuses.* The abuses that be in the church ought to be corrected by the prynces. The ministers ought to preache against abuses. Any maner of mere tradicions of man are abuses.'

What, meanwhile, is their prince doing, and why does he leave abuses in the church? The Christian must rise and protest; we must purge the church from the pagan crust with which tradition has covered it.[1] Such are the ideas conceived by these uncultivated minds. Fancy the simple folk, more capable by their simplicity of a sturdy faith, these freeholders, these big traders, who have sat on juries, voted at elections, deliberated, discussed in common private and public business, used to examine the law, the adducing of precedents, all the detail of juridical and legal procedure; bringing their lawyer's and pleader's training to bear upon the interpretation of Scripture, who, having once formed a conviction, employ for it the cold passion, the intractable obstinacy, the heroic sternness of the English character. Their precise and combative minds take the business in hand. Every one holds himself bound to be ready, strong, and well prepared to answer all such as shall demand a reason of his faith. Each one has his difficulty and conscientious scruple[2] about some portion of the liturgy or the official hierarchy; about the dignities of canons and archdeacons, or certain passages of the funeral service; about the sacramental bread or the reading of the apocryphal books in church; about plurality of benefices or the ecclesiastical square cap. They each oppose some point, all together the episcopacy and the retention of Romish ceremonies.[3] Then they are imprisoned, fined, pilloried; they have their ears cut off; their ministers are dismissed, hunted out, prosecuted.[4] The law declares that any one above the age of sixteen who for the space of a month shall refuse to attend the established worship, shall be imprisoned until such time as he shall submit; and if he does not submit at the end of three months, he shall be banished the kingdom; and if he returns, put to death. They submit, and show as much firmness in suffering as scruple in belief; for a tittle, on the reception of the communion sitting rather than kneeling, or standing rather than sitting, they give up their

[1] Examination of Mr Axton: 'I can't consent to wear the surplice, it is against my conscience; I trust, by the help of God, I shall never put on that sleeve, which is a mark of the beast.'—Examination of Mr White, 'a substantial citizen of London' (1572), accused of not going to the parish church: 'The whole Scriptures are for destroying idolatry, and everything that belongs to it.'—'Where is the place where these are forbidden?'—'In Deuteronomy and other places; . . . and God by Isaiah commandeth not to pollute ourselves with the garments of the image.'

[2] One expression continually occurs: 'Tenderness of conscience'—'a squeamish stomach'—'our weaker brethren.'

[3] The separation of the Anglicans and dissenters may be dated from 1564.

[4] 1592.

livings, their property, their liberty, their country. One Dr. Leighton was imprisoned fifteen weeks in a dog's kennel, without fire, roof, bed, and in irons: his hair and skin fell off; he was set in the pillory during the November frosts, then whipt, and branded on the forehead; his ears were cut off, his nose slit; he was shut up eight years in the Fleet, and thence cast into the common prison. Many went cheerfully to the stake. Religion with them was a covenant, that is, a treaty made with God, which must be kept before all, as a written engagement, to the letter, to the last syllable. An admirable and deplorable stiffness of an over-scrupulous conscience, which made cavillers at the same time with believers, which was to make tyrants after it had made martyrs.

Between the two, it made fighting men. They became wonderfully enriched and increased in the course of eighty years, as is always the case with men who labour, live honestly, and pass their lives uprightly, sustained by a powerful source of action from within. Thenceforth they are able to resist, and they do resist when driven to extremities; they choose to have recourse to arms rather than be driven back to idolatry and sin. The Long Parliament assembles, defeats the king, purges religion; the dam is broken, the Independents are hurled above the Presbyterians, the fanatics above the merely fervid; irresistible and overwhelming faith, enthusiasm, grow into a torrent, swallow up, or at least disturb the strongest minds, politicians, lawyers, captains. The Commons occupy a day in every week in deliberating on the progress of religion. As soon as they touch upon doctrines they become furious. A poor man, Paul Best, being accused of denying the Trinity, they demand the passing of a decree to punish him with death; James Nayler having imagined that he was God, the Commons devote themselves to a trial of eleven days, with a Hebraic animosity and ferocity: 'I think him worse than possessed with the devil. Our God is here supplanted. My ears trembled, my heart shuddered, on hearing this report. I will speak no more. Let us all stop our ears and stone him.'[1] Before the House, publicly, the men in authority had ecstasies. After the expulsion of the Presbyterians the preacher Hugh Peters started up in the middle of a sermon, and cried out: 'Now I have it by Revelation, now I shall tell you. This army must root up Monarchy, not only here, but in France and other kingdoms round about; this is to bring you out of Egypt: this Army is that corner-stone cut out of the Mountaine, which must dash the powers of the earth to pieces. But it is objected, the way we walk in is without president (*sic*); what think you of the Virgin Mary? was there ever any president before, that a Woman should conceive a Child without the company of a Man? This is an Age to make examples and presidents in.'[2] Cromwell found prophecies, counsels in the Bible for the present time, positive justifications of his policy. 'He

[1] Burton's *Parliamentary Diary*, ed. by Rutt, 1828, 4 vols., i. 54.
[2] Walker's *History of Independency*, 1648, part ii. p. 49.

looked upon the Design of the Lord in this day to be the freeing of His People from every Burden, and that was now accomplishing what was prophesied in the 110th Psalm; from the Consideration of which he was often encouraged to attend the effecting those Ends, spending at least an hour in the Exposition of that Psalm.'[1] Granted that he was a schemer, ambitious before everything, yet he was truly fanatical and sincere. His doctor related that he had been very melancholy for years at a time, with strange hallucinations, and the frequent fancy that he was at death's door. Two years before the Revolution he wrote to his cousin: 'Truly no poor creature hath more cause to put himself forth in the cause of his God than I. . . . The Lord accept me in His Son, and give me to walk in the light,—and give us to walk in the light, as He is the light! . . . blessed be His Name for shining upon so dark a heart as mine!'[2] Certainly he must have dreamed of becoming a saint as well as a king, and aspired to salvation as well as to a throne. At the moment when he was proceeding to Ireland, and was about to massacre the Catholics there, he wrote to his daughter-in-law a letter of advice which Baxter or Taylor might willingly have subscribed. In the midst of pressing affairs, in 1651, he thus exhorted his wife: 'My dearest, I could not satisfy myself to omit this post, although I have not much to write. . . . It joys me to hear thy soul prospereth: the Lord increase His favours to thee more and more. The great good thy soul can wish is, That the Lord lift upon thee the light of His countenance, which is better than life. The Lord bless all thy good counsel and example to all those about thee, and hear all thy prayers, and accept thee always.'[3] Dying, he asked whether grace once received could be lost, and was reassured to learn that it could not, being, as he said, certain that he had once been in a state of grace. He died with this prayer: 'Lord, though I am a miserable and wretched creature, I am in Covenant with Thee through grace. And I may, I will, come to Thee, for Thy People.

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[1] This passage may serve as an example of the difficulties and perplexities to which a translator of any History of Literature must always be exposed, and this without any fault of the original author. *Ab uno disce omnes.* M. Taine says that Cromwell found justification for his policy in Psalm cxiii., which, on looking out, I found to be 'an exhortation to praise God for His excellency and for His mercy,'—a psalm by which Cromwell's conduct could nowise be justified. I opened then Carlyle's *Cromwell's Letters*, etc., and found, in vol. ii. part vi. p. 157, the same fact stated, but Psalm cx. mentioned and given,—a far more likely psalm to have influenced Cromwell. Carlyle refers to *Ludlow*, i. 319, Taine to Guizot, *Portraits Politiques*, p. 63, and to Carlyle. In looking in Guizot's volume, 5th ed., 1862, I find that this writer also mentions Psalm cxiii.; but on referring finally to the *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, printed at Vivay (*sic*) in the Canton of Bern, 1698, I found, in vol. i. p. 319, the sentence, as given above; therefore Carlyle was in the right.—TR.

[2] *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, ed. Carlyle, 1866, 3 vols., i. 79.

[3] *Idem*, ii. 273.

Thou hast made me, though very unworthy, a mean instrument to do them some good, and Thee service. . . . Lord, however Thou do dispose of me, continue and go on to do good for them . . . and go on . . . with the work of reformation; and make the Name of Christ glorious in the world.'[1] Underneath this practical, prudent, worldly spirit, there was an English element of anxious and powerful imagination,[2] capable of engendering an impassioned Calvinism and mystic fears. The same contrasts were jumbled together and reconciled in the other Independents. In 1648, after unsuccessful tactics, they were in danger between the king and the Parliament; then they assembled for several days together at Windsor to confess themselves to God, and seek His assistance; and they discovered that all their evils came from the conferences they had had the weakness to propose to the king. 'And in this path the Lord led us,' said Adjutant Allen, 'not only to see our sin, but also our duty; and this so unanimously set with weight upon each heart that none was able hardly to speak a word to each other for bitter weeping, partly in the sense and shame of our iniquities; of our unbelief, base fear of men, and carnal consultations (as the fruit thereof) with our own wisdoms, and not with the Word of the Lord.'[3] Then they resolved to bring the king to judgment and death, and did as they had resolved.

Around them, fanaticism and folly gained ground. Independents, Millenarians, Antinomians, Anabaptists, Libertines, Familists, Quakers, Enthusiasts, Seekers, Perfectionists, Socinians, Arians, anti-Trinitarians, anti-Scripturalists, Sceptics; the list of sects is interminable. Women, troopers, suddenly got up into the pulpit and preached. The strangest ceremonies took place in public. In 1644, says Dr. Featly, the Anabaptists rebaptised a hundred men and women together at twilight, in streams, in branches of the Thames and elsewhere, plunging them in the water over head and ears. One Oates, in the county of Essex, was brought before a jury for the murder of Anne Martin, who died a few days after her baptism of a cold which had seized her. George Fox the Quaker spoke with God, and witnessed with a loud voice, in the streets and market-places, against the sins of the age. William Simpson, one of his disciples, 'was moved of the Lord to go, at several times, for three years, naked and barefoot before them, as a sign unto them, in the markets, courts, towns, cities, to priests' houses, and to great men's houses, telling them, so shall they all be stripped naked, as he was stripped naked. And sometimes he was moved to put on

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[1] *Cromwell's Letters*, ed. Carlyle, iii. 373.

[2] See his speeches. The style is disjointed, obscure, impassioned, marvellous, like that of a man who is not master of his wits, and who yet sees straight by a sort of intuition.

[3] *Cromwell's Letters*, i. 265.

hair sackcloth, and to besmear his face, and to tell them, so would the Lord besmear all their religion as he was besmeared.[1]

'A female came into Whitehall Chapel stark naked, in the midst of public worship, the Lord Protector himself being present. A Quaker came to the door of the Parliament House with a drawn sword, and wounded several who were present, saying that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to kill every man that sat in the house.' The Fifth Monarchy men believed that Christ was about to descend to reign in person upon earth for a thousand years, with the saints for His ministers. The Ranters looked upon furious vociferations and contortions as the principal signs of faith. The Seekers thought that religious truth could only be seized in a sort of mystical fog, with doubt and fear. The Muggletonians decided that 'John Reeve and Ludovick Muggleton were the two last prophets and messengers of God;' they declared the Quakers possessed of the devil, exorcised him, and prophesied that William Penn would be damned. I have before mentioned James Nayler, an old quartermaster of General Lambert, adored as a god by his followers. Several women led his horse, others cast before him their kerchiefs and scarves, singing, Holy, holy, Lord God. They called him 'lovely among ten thousand, the only Son of God, the prophet of the Most High, King of Israel, the eternal Son of Justice, the Prince of Peace, Jesus, him in whom the hope of Israel rests.' One of them, Dorcas Erbury, declared that she had lain dead for two whole days in her prison in Exeter Gaol, and that Nayler had restored her to life by laying his hands upon her. Sarah Blackbury finding him a prisoner, took him by the hand and said, 'Rise up my love, my dove, my fairest one: why stayest thou among the pots?' Then she kissed his hand and fell down before him. When he was put in the pillory, some of his disciples began to sing, weep, smite their breasts; others kissed his hands, rested on his bosom, and kissed his wounds.[2] Bedlam broken loose could not have surpassed them.

Underneath these disorderly bubbles at the surface, the wise and deep strata of the nation had settled, and the new faith was doing its work with them,—a practical and positive, a political and moral work. Whilst the German Reformation, after the German wont, resulted in great volumes and a scholastic system, the English Reformation, after the English wont, resulted in action and establishments. 'How the Church of Christ shall be governed;' that was the great question which was discussed among the sects. The House of Commons asked the assembly of theologians: If the classical, provincial, and local assemblies were *jure divino*, and instituted by the will and appointment

[1] *A Journal of the Life, etc., of that Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, George Fox*, 6th edit., 1836.

[2] Burton's *Parliamentary Diary*, i. 46–173. Neal, *History of the Puritans*, iii., Supplt.

of Jesus Christ? If they were all so? If only some were so, and which? If appeals carried by the elders of a congregation to provincial, departmental, and national assemblies were *jure divino*, and according to the will and appointment of Jesus Christ? If some only were *jure divino?* Which? If the power of the assemblies in such appeals was *jure divino*, and by the will and appointment of Jesus Christ? and a hundred other questions of the same kind. Parliament declared that, according to Scripture, the dignities of priest and bishop were equal; it regulated ordinations, convocations, excommunications, jurisdictions, elections; spent half its time and exerted all its power in establishing the Presbyterian Church.[1] So, with the Independents, fervour engendered courage and discipline. 'Cromwell's regiment of horse were most of them freeholders' sons, who engaged in the war upon principles of conscience; and that being well armed within, by the satisfaction of their consciences, and without with good iron arms, they would as one man stand firmly and charge desperately.'[2] This army, in which inspired corporals preached to lukewarm colonels, acted with the solidity and precision of a Russian regiment: it was a duty, a duty to God, to fire straight and march in good order; and a perfect Christian made a perfect soldier. There was no separation here between theory and practice, between private and public life, between the spiritual and the temporal. They wished to apply Scripture to 'establish the kingdom of heaven upon earth,' to institute not only a Christian church, but a Christian society, to change the law into a guardian of morals, to exact piety and virtue; and for a while they succeeded in it. 'Though the discipline of the church was at an end, there was nevertheless an uncommon spirit of devotion among people in the parliament quarters; the Lord's day was observed with remarkable strictness, the churches being crouded with numerous and attentive hearers three or four times in the day; the officers of the peace patroled the streets, and shut up all publick houses; there was no travelling on the road, or walking in the fields, except in cases of absolute necessity. Religious exercises were set up in private families, as reading the Scriptures, family prayer, repeating sermons, and singing of psalms, which was so universal, that you might walk through the city of London on the evening of the Lord's day, without seeing an idle person, or hearing anything but the voice of prayer or praise from churches and private houses.'[3] People would rise before the day, and walk a great distance to be able to hear the word of God. 'There were no gaming-houses, or houses of pleasure; no profane

[1] See Neal, *Hist. of the Puritans*, ii. 418–450.

[2] Whitelocke's *Memorials*, i. 68.

[3] Neal, ii. 553. Compare with the French Revolution. When the Bastille was demolished, they wrote on the ruins these words: 'Ici l'on danse.' From this contrast we see the difference between the two doctrines and the two nations.

swearing, drunkenness, or any kind of debauchery.'[1] The Parliamentary soldiers came in great numbers to listen to sermons, spoke of religion, prayed and sang psalms together, when on duty. In 1644 Parliament forbade the sale of commodities on Sunday, and ordained, 'that no person shall travel, or carry a burden, or do any worldly labour, upon penalty of 10s. for the traveller, and 5s. for every burden. That no person shall on the Lord's day use, or be present at, any wrestling, shooting, fowling, ringing of bells for pleasure, markets, wakes, church-ales, dancing, games or sports whatsoever, upon penalty of 5s. to every one above fourteen years of age. And if children are found offending in the premises, their parents or guardians to forfeit 12d. for every offence. If the several fines above mentioned cannot be levied, the offending party shall be set in the stocks for the space of three hours.' When the Independents were in power, the severity was still more harsh. The officers in the army, having convicted one of their quartermasters of blasphemy, condemned him to have his tongue bored with a red hot iron, his sword broken over his head, and himself to be dismissed from the army. During Cromwell's expedition in Ireland, we read that no blasphemy was heard in the camp; the soldiers spent their leisure hours in reading the Bible, singing psalms, and holding religious controversies. In 1650 the punishments inflicted on Sabbath-breakers were redoubled. Stern laws were passed against betting, gallantry was reckoned a crime; the theatres were destroyed, the spectators fined, the actors whipt at the cart's tail; adultery punished with death: in order to reach crime more surely, they persecuted pleasure. But if they were austere against others, they were so against themselves, and practised the virtues they exacted. After the Restoration, two thousand ministers, rather than conform to the new liturgy, resigned their cures, though they and their families had to die of hunger. Many of them, says Baxter, thinking that they were not justified in quitting their ministry after being set apart for it by ordination, preached to such as would hear them in the fields and in certain houses, until they were seized and thrown into prisons, where a great number of them perished. Cromwell's fifty thousand veterans, suddenly disbanded and without resources, did not bring a single recruit to the vagabonds and bandits. 'The Royalists themselves confessed that, in every department of honest industry, the discarded warriors prospered beyond other men, that none was charged with any theft or robbery, that none was heard to ask an alms, and that, if a baker, a mason, or a waggoner attracted notice by his diligence and sobriety, he was in all probability one of Oliver's old soldiers.'[2] Purified by persecution and ennobled by patience, they ended by winning the tolerance of

[1] Neal, *Hist. of the Puritans*, ii. 555.

[2] Macaulay, *Hist. of England*, ed. Lady Trevelyan, i. 121.

the law and the respect of the public, and raised the national morality, as they had saved the national liberty. But others, exiles in America, pushed to an extremity this great religious and stoical spirit, with its weaknesses and its power, with its vices and its virtues. Their determination, intensified by a fervent faith, employed in political and practical pursuits, invented the science of emigration, made exile tolerable, drove back the Indians, fertilised the desert, raised a rigid morality into a civil law, founded and armed a church, and on the Bible as a basis built up a new state.[1]

That was not a conception of life from which a genuine literature might be expected to issue. The idea of the beautiful is wanting, and what is a literature without it? The natural expression of the heart's emotions is proscribed, and what is a literature without it? They abolished as impious the free stage and the rich poesy which the Renaissance had brought them. They rejected as profane the ornate style and ample eloquence which had been established around them by the imitation of antiquity and of Italy. They mistrusted reason, and were incapable of philosophy. They ignored the divine languor of Jeremy Taylor, and the touching tenderness of the gospel. Their character exhibits only manliness, their conduct austerity, their mind preciseness. We find amongst them only excited theologians, minute controversialists, energetic men of action, limited and patient minds, engrossed in positive proofs and practical labours, void of general ideas and refined tastes, resting upon texts, dry and obstinate reasoners, who twisted the Scripture in order to extract from it a form of government or a table of dogma. What could be narrower or more repulsive than these pursuits and wrangles? A pamphlet of the time petitions for liberty of conscience, and draws its arguments (1) from the parable of the wheat and the tares which grow together till the harvest; (2) from this maxim of the Apostles, Let every man be thoroughly persuaded in his own mind; (3) from this text, Whatsoever is not of faith is sin; (4) from this divine rule of our Saviour, Do to others what you would they should do unto you. Later, when the furious Commons desired to pass judgment on James Nayler, the trial became entangled in an endless juridical and theological discussion, some declaring that the crime committed was idolatry, others seduction, all emptying out before the House their armoury of commentaries and texts.[2] Seldom is a gene-

[1] A certain John Denis was publicly whipt for having sung a profane song. Mathias, a girl, having given some roasted chestnuts to Jeremiah Boosy, and told him ironically that they would put him into Paradise, was ordered to ask pardon three times in church, and to be three days on bread and water in prison. 1660–1670; records of Massachusetts.

[2] 'Upon the common sense of Scripture,' said Major-general Disbrowe, 'there are few but do commit blasphemy, as our Saviour puts it in Mark: "sins, blasphemies; if so, then none without blasphemy." It was charged upon David, and Eli's son, "thou hast blasphemed, or caused others to blaspheme."'—Burton's *Diary*, i. 54.

ration found more mutilated in all the faculties which produce contemplation and ornament, more limited in the faculties which nourish discussion and morality. Like a beautiful insect which has become transformed and has lost its wings, so we see the poetic generation of Elizabeth disappear, leaving in its place but a sluggish caterpillar, a stubborn and useful spinner, armed with industrious feet and formidable jaws, spending its existence in eating into old leaves and devouring its enemies. They are without style; they speak like business men; at most, here and there, a pamphlet of Prynne possesses a little vigour. Their histories, like May's for instance, are flat and heavy. Their memoirs, even those of Ludlow and Mrs. Hutchinson, are long, wearisome, mere statements, destitute of personal feelings, void of enthusiasm or entertaining matter; 'they seem to ignore themselves, and are engrossed by the general prospects of their cause.'[1] Good works of piety, solid and convincing sermons; sincere, edifying, exact, methodical books, like those of Baxter, Barclay, Calamy, John Owen; personal narratives, like that of Baxter, like Fox's journal, Bunyan's life, a large collection of documents and arguments, conscientiously arranged,—this is all they offer: the Puritan destroys the artist, stiffens the man, fetters the writer; and leaves of artist, man, writer, only a sort of abstract being, the slave of a watchword. If a Milton springs up amongst them, it is because by his wide curiosity, his travels, his comprehensive education, above all by his youth saturated in the great poetry of the preceding age, and by his independence of spirit, loftily adhered to even against the sectarians, Milton passes beyond sectarianism. Strictly speaking, they could but have one poet, an involuntary poet, a madman, a martyr, a hero, and a victim of grace; a genuine preacher, who attains the beautiful by accident, whilst pursuing the useful on principle; a poor tinker, who, employing images so as to be understood by mechanics, sailors, servant-girls, attained, without pretending to it, eloquence and high art.

VI.

After the Bible, the book most widely read in England is the *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. The reason is, that the basis of Protestantism is the doctrine of salvation by grace, and that no writer has equalled Bunyan in making this doctrine understood.

To treat well of supernatural impressions, one must have been subject to them. Bunyan had that kind of imagination which produces them. Powerful as that of an artist, but more vehement, this imagination worked in the man without his co-operation, and besieged him with visions which he had neither willed nor foreseen. From that moment there was in him as it were a second self, dominating the first, grand and terrible, whose apparitions were sudden, its motions unknown, which redoubled or crushed his faculties, prostrated or transported him,

[1] Guizot, *Portraits Politiques*, 5th ed., 1862.

bathed him in the sweat of anguish, ravished him with trances of joy, and which by its force, strangeness, independence, impressed upon him the presence and the action of a foreign and superior master. Bunyan, like Saint Theresa, was from infancy 'greatly troubled with the thoughts of the fearful torments of hell-fire,' sad in the midst of pleasures, believing himself damned, and so despairing, that he wished he was a devil, 'supposing they were only tormentors; that if it must needs be that I went thither, I might be rather a tormentor, than be tormented myself.'[1] There already was the assault of exact and bodily images. Under their influence reflexion ceased, and the man was suddenly spurred into action. The first movement carried him with closed eyes, as down a steep slope, into mad resolutions. One day, 'being in the field, with my companions, it chanced that an adder passed over the highway: so I, having a stick, struck her over the back; and having stunned her, I forced open her mouth with my stick, and plucked her sting out with my fingers, by which act, had not God been merciful to me, I might, by my desperateness, have brought myself to my end.'[2] In his first approaches to conversion he was extreme in his emotions, and penetrated to the heart by the sight of physical objects, 'adoring' priest, service, altar, vestment. 'This conceit grew so strong upon my spirit, that had I but seen a priest (though never so sordid and debauched in his life), I should find my spirit fall under him, reverence him, and knit unto him; yea, I thought, for the love I did bear unto them (supposing they were the ministers of God), I could have laid down at their feet, and have been trampled upon by them; their name, their garb, and work did so intoxicate and bewitch me.'[3] Already his ideas clung to him with that irresistible hold which constitutes monomania; no matter how absurd they were, they ruled him, not by their truth, but by their presence. The thought of an impossible danger terrified him as much as the sight of an imminent peril. As a man hung over an abyss by a sound rope, he forgot that the rope was sound, and vertigo seized upon him. After the fashion of English villagers, he loved bell-ringing: when he became a Puritan, he considered the amusement profane, and gave it up; yet, impelled by his desire, he would go into the belfry and watch the ringers. 'But quickly after, I began to think, "How if one of the bells should fall?" Then I chose to stand under a main beam, that lay overthwart the steeple, from side to side, thinking here I might stand sure: but then I thought again, should the bell fall with a swing, it might first hit the wall, and then rebounding upon me, might kill me for all this beam. This made me stand in the steeple-door; and now, thought I, I am safe enough, for if a bell should then fall, I can slip out behind these thick walls, and so be preserved notwithstanding. So after this I would yet go to see them ring, but would not go any farther than the steeple-door; but then it came into my

[1] *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, § 7. [2] *Ibid.* § 12. [3] *Ibid.* § 17.

head, "How if the steeple itself should fall?" And this thought (it may, for aught I know, when I stood and looked on) did continually so shake my mind, that I durst not stand at the steeple-door any longer, but was forced to flee, for fear the steeple should fall upon my head.'[1] Frequently the mere conception of a sin became for him a temptation so involuntary and so strong, that he felt upon him the sharp claw of the devil. The fixed idea swelled in his head like a painful abscess, full of sensitiveness and of his life's blood. 'Now no sin would serve but that: if it were to be committed by speaking of such a word, then I have been as if my mouth would have spoken that word whether I would or no; and in so strong a measure was the temptation upon me, that often I have been ready to clap my hands under my chin, to hold my mouth from opening; at other times, to leap with my head downward into some muckhill hole, to keep my mouth from speaking.'[2] Later, in the middle of a sermon which he was preaching, he was assailed by blasphemous thoughts: the word came to his lips, and all his power of resistance was barely able to restrain the muscle excited by the tyrannous brain.

Once the minister of the parish was preaching against the sin of dancing, oaths, and games, when he was struck with the idea that the sermon was for him, and returned home full of trouble. But he ate; his stomach being charged, discharged his brain, and his remorse was dispersed. Like a true child, entirely absorbed by the emotion of the moment, he was transported, jumped out, and ran to the sports. He had thrown his ball, and was about to begin again, when a voice from heaven suddenly pierced his soul. '"Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?" At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore, leaving my cat upon the ground, I looked up to heaven, and was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus look down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if He did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these and other ungodly practices.'[3] Suddenly reflecting that his sins were very great, and that he would certainly be damned whatever he did, he resolved to enjoy himself in the meantime, and to sin as much as he could in his life. He took up his ball again, recommenced the game with ardour, and swore louder and oftener than ever. A month afterwards, being reproved by a woman, 'I was silenced, and put to secret shame, and that too, as I thought, before the God of heaven: wherefore, while I stood there, hanging down my head, I wished that I might be a little child again, and that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing; for, thought I, I am so accustomed to it, that it is in vain to think of a reformation, for that could never be. But how it came to pass I know not, I did from this time forward so leave my swearing, that it was a

[1] *Grace Abounding*, §§ 33, 34. [2] *Ibid.* § 103. [3] *Ibid.* § 22.

great wonder to myself to observe it; and whereas before I knew not how to speak unless I put an oath before, and another behind, to make my words have authority, now I could without it speak better, and with more pleasantness, than ever I could before.'[1] These sudden alternations, these vehement resolutions, this unlooked-for renewing of heart, are the products of an involuntary and impassioned imagination, which by its hallucinations, its mastery, its fixed ideas, its mad ideas, prepares the way for a poet, and announces one inspired.

In him circumstances develop character; his kind of life develops his kind of mind. He was born in the lowest and most despised rank, a tinker's son, himself a wandering tinker, with a wife as poor as himself, so that they had not a spoon or a dish between them. He had been taught in childhood to read and write, but he had since 'almost wholly lost what he had learned.' Education draws out and disciplines a man; fills him with varied and rational ideas; prevents him from sinking into monomania or being excited by transport; gives him determinate thoughts instead of eccentric fancies, pliable opinions for fixed convictions; replaces impetuous images by calm reasonings, sudden resolves by the results of reflection; furnishes us with the wisdom and ideas of others; gives us conscience and self-command. Suppress this reason and this discipline, and consider the poor working man at his work; his head works while his hands work, not ably, with methods acquired from any logic he might have mustered, but with dark emotions, beneath a disorderly flow of confused images. Morning and evening, the hammer which he uses in his trade, drives in with its deafening sounds the same thought perpetually returning and self-communing. A troubled, obstinate vision floats before him in the brightness of the hammered and quivering metal. In the red furnace where the iron is bubbling, in the clang of the hammered brass, in the black corners where the damp shadow creeps, he sees the flame and darkness of hell, and the rattling of eternal chains. Next day he sees the same image, the day after, the whole week, month, year. His brow wrinkles, his eyes grow sad, and his wife hears him groan in the night-time. She remembers that she has two volumes in an old bag, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety;* she spells them out to console him; and the impressive thoughtfulness, already sublime, made more so by the slowness with which it is read, sinks like an oracle into his subdued faith. The braziers of the devils—the golden harps of heaven—the bleeding Christ on the cross,—each of these deep-rooted ideas sprouts poisonously or wholesomely in his diseased brain, spreads, pushes out and springs higher with a ramification of fresh visions, so crowded, that in his encumbered mind he has no further place nor air for more conceptions. Will he rest when he sets forth in the winter on his tramp? During his long solitary wanderings, over wild heaths, in cursed and

[1] *Grace Abounding*, §§ 27 and 28.

haunted bogs, always abandoned to his own thoughts, the inevitable idea pursues him. These neglected roads where he sticks in the mud, these sluggish rivers which he crosses on the cranky ferry-boat, these threatening whispers of the woods at night, where in perilous places the livid moon shadows out ambushed forms,—all that he sees and hears falls into an involuntary poem around the one absorbing idea; thus it changes into a vast body of sensible legends, and multiplies its power as it multiplies its details. Having become a dissenter, Bunyan is shut up for twelve years, having no other amusement but the *Book of Martyrs* and the Bible, in one of those infectious prisons where the Puritans rotted under the Restoration. There he is, still alone, thrown back upon himself by the monotony of his dungeon, besieged by the terrors of the Old Testament, by the vengeful outpourings or denunciations of the prophets, by the thunder-striking words of Paul, by the spectacle of trances and of martyrs, face to face with God, now in despair, now consoled, troubled with involuntary images and unlooked-for emotions, seeing alternately devil and angels, the actor and the witness of an internal drama whose vicissitudes he is able to relate. He writes them: it is his book. You see now the condition of this inflamed brain. Poor in ideas, full of images, given up to a fixed and single thought, plunged into this thought by his mechanical pursuit, by his prison and his readings, by his knowledge and his ignorance, circumstances, like nature, make him a visionary and an artist, furnish him with supernatural impressions and sensible images, teaching him the history of grace and the means of expressing it.

The *Pilgrim's Progress* is a manual of devotion for the use of simple folk, whilst it is an allegorical poem of grace. In it we hear a man of the people speaking to the people, who would render intelligible to all the terrible doctrine of damnation and salvation.[1] According to Bunyan,

[1] This is an abstract of the events:—From highest heaven a voice has proclaimed vengeance against the City of Destruction, where lives a sinner of the name of *Christian*. Terrified, he rises up amid the jeers of his neighbours, and departs, for fear of being devoured by the fire which is to consume the criminals. A helpful man, *Evangelist*, shows him the right road. A treacherous man, *Worldly-wise*, tries to turn him aside. His companion, *Pliable*, who had followed him at first, gets stuck in the Slough of Despond, and leaves him. He advances bravely across the dirty water and the slippery mud, and reaches the *Strait Gate*, where a wise *Interpreter* instructs him by visible shows, and points out the way to the Heavenly City. He passes before a cross, and the heavy burden of sins, which he carried on his back, is loosened and falls off. He painfully climbs the steep hill of *Difficulty*, and reaches a great castle, where *Watchful*, the guardian, gives him in charge to his good daughters *Piety* and *Prudence*, who warn him and arm him against the monsters of hell. He finds his road barred by one of these demons, *Apollyon*, who bids him abjure obedience to the heavenly King. After a long fight he slays him. Yet the way grows narrow, the shades fall thicker, sulphurous flames rise along the road: it is the valley of the *Shadow of Death*. He passes it, and arrives at the town of Vanity, a vast fair of business, deceits, and shows, which he walks

we are 'children of wrath,' condemned from our birth, guilty by nature, justly predestined to destruction. Under this formidable thought the heart gives way. The unhappy man relates how he trembled in all his limbs, and in his fits it seemed to him as though the bones of his chest would break. 'One day,' he tells us, 'I walked to a neighbouring town, and sat down upon a settle in the street, and fell into a very deep pause about the most fearful state my sin had brought me to; and after long musing, I lifted up my head, but methought I saw, as if the sun that shineth in the heavens did grudge to give light; and as if the very stones in the street, and tiles upon the houses, did bend themselves against me. O how happy now was every creature over I was! For they stood fast, and kept their station, but I was gone and lost.'[1] The devils gathered together against the repentant sinner; they choked his sight, besieged him with phantoms, yelled at his side to drag him down their precipices; and the black valley into which the pilgrim plunges, almost matches by the horror of its sight the anguish of the terrors by which he is assailed:—

'I saw then in my Dream, so far as this Valley reached, there was on the right hand a very deep Ditch; that Ditch is it into which the blind have led the blind in all ages, and have both there miserably perished. Again, behold on the left hand, there was a very dangerous Quag, into which, if even a good man falls, he can find no bottom for his foot to stand on. . . .

'The path-way was here also exceeding narrow, and therefore good Christian was the more put to it; for when he sought in the dark to shun the ditch on the one hand, he was ready to tip over into the mire on the other; also when he sought to escape the mire, without great carefulness he would be ready to fall into the ditch. Thus he went on, and I heard him here sigh bitterly; for, besides the dangers mentioned above, the path-way was here so dark, that ofttimes, when he lift up his foot to set forward, he knew not where, or upon what he should set it next.

'About the midst of this Valley, I perceived the mouth of Hell to be, and it stood also hard by the wayside. Now thought Christian, what shall I do? And ever and anon the flame and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises, . . . that he was forced to put up his Sword, and betake himself to another weapon, called All-prayer. So he cried in my hearing: "O Lord I beseech thee deliver my soul." Thus he went on a great while, yet still the flames would be reaching towards him: Also he heard doleful voices, and rushings to and fro, so that sometimes he thought he should be torn in pieces, or trodden down like mire in the Streets.'[2]

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by with lowered eyes, not wishing to take part in its festivities or falsehoods. The people of the place beat him, throw him into prison, condemn him as a traitor and rebel, burn his companion *Faithful*. Escaped from their hands, he falls into those of *Giant Despair*, who beats him, leaves him in a poisonous dungeon without food, and giving him daggers and cords, advises him to rid himself from so many misfortunes. At last he reaches the *Delectable Mountains*, whence he sees the holy city. To enter it he has only to cross a deep river, where there is no foothold, where the water dims the sight, and which is called the river of Death.

[1] Bunyan's *Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, § 187.

[2] *Pilgrim's Progress*, Cambridge 1862, First Part, p. 64.

Against this anguish, neither his good deeds, nor his prayers, nor his justice, nor all the justice and all the prayers of all other men, could defend him. Grace alone justifies. God must impute to him the purity of Christ, and save him by a free choice. What is more full of passion than the scene in which, under the name of his poor pilgrim, he relates his own doubts, his conversion, his joy, and the sudden change of his heart?

'Then the water stood in mine eyes, and I asked further, But Lord, may such a great sinner as I am be indeed accepted of thee, and be saved by thee? And I heard him say, And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. . . . And now was my heart full of joy, mine eyes full of tears, and mine affections running over with love to the Name, People, and Ways of Jesus Christ. . . .

'It made me see that all the World, notwithstanding all the righteousness thereof, is in a state of condemnation. It made me see that God the Father, though he be just, can justly justify the coming sinner. It made me greatly ashamed of the vileness of my former life, and confounded me with the sense of mine own ignorance; for there never came thought into my heart before now, that shewed me so the beauty of Jesus Christ. It made me love a holy life, and long to do something for the Honour and Glory of the Name of the Lord Jesus; yea, I thought that had I now a thousand gallons of blood in my body, I could spill it all for the sake of the Lord Jesus.'[1]

Such an emotion does not weigh literary calculations. Allegory, the most artificial kind, is natural to Bunyan. If he employs it here, it is because he does so throughout; if he employs it throughout, it is from necessity, not choice. As children, countrymen, and all uncultivated minds, he transforms arguments into parables; he only grasps truth when it is made simple by images; abstract terms elude him; he must touch forms and contemplate colours. Dry general truths are a sort of algebra, acquired by the mind slowly and after much trouble, against our primitive inclination, which is to observe detailed events and sensible objects; man being incapable of contemplating pure formulas until he is transformed by ten years' reading and reflection. We understand at once the term purification of heart; Bunyan understands it fully only, after translating it by this fable:—

'Then the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a very large Parlour that was full of dust, because never swept; the which after he had reviewed a little while, the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now when he began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about, that Christian had almost therewith been choaked. Then said the Interpreter to a Damsel that stood by, Bring hither the Water, and sprinkle the Room; the which when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure,

'Then said Christian, What means this?

'The Interpreter answered, This parlour is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet Grace of the Gospel: the dust is his Original Sin, and inward Corruptions, that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep

[1] *Pilgrim's Progress*, First Part, p. 160.

at first, is the Law; but she that brought water, and did sprinkle it, is the Gospel. Now, whereas thou sawest that so soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about that the Room by him could not be cleansed, but that thou wast almost choaked therewith; this is to shew thee, that the Law, instead of cleansing the heart (by its working) from sin, doth revive, put strength into, and increase it in the soul, even as it doth discover and forbid it, for it doth not give power to subdue.

'Again, as thou sawest the Damsel sprinkle the room with Water, upon which it was cleansed with pleasure; this is to shew thee, that when the Gospel comes in the sweet and precious influences thereof to the heart, then I say, even as thou sawest the Damsel lay the dust by sprinkling the floor with Water, so is sin vanquished and subdued, and the soul made clean, through the faith of it, and consequently fit for the King of Glory to inhabit.'[1]

These repetitions, embarrassed phrases, familiar comparisons, this frank style, whose awkwardness recalls the childish periods of Herodotus, and whose light-heartedness recalls tales for children, prove that if his work is allegorical, it is so in order that it may be intelligible, and that Bunyan is a poet because he is a child.[2]

Again, under his simplicity you will find power, and in his puerility the vision. These allegories are hallucinations as clear, complete, and sound as ordinary perceptions. No one but Spenser is so lucid. Imaginary objects rise of themselves within him. He has no trouble in calling them up or forming them. They agree in all their details with all the details of the precept which they represent, as a pliant veil fits the body which it covers. He distinguishes and arranges all the parts of the landscape—here the river, on the right the castle, a flag on its left turret, the setting sun three feet lower, an oval cloud in the front part of the sky—with the preciseness of a carpenter. We fancy in reading him that we are looking at the old maps of the time, in which the striking features of the angular cities are marked on the copperplate by a tool as certain as a pair of compasses.[3] Dialogues flow from his pen as in a dream. He does not seem to be thinking; we should even

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[1] *Pilgrim's Progress*, First Part, p. 26.

[2] Here is another of his allegories, almost spiritual, so just and simple it is. See *Pilgrim's Progress*, First Part, p. 68: Now I saw in my Dream, that at the end of this Valley lay blood, bones, ashes, and mangled bodies of men, even of Pilgrims that had gone this way formerly; and while I was musing what should be the reason, I espied a little before me a Cave, where two Giants, Pope and Pagan, dwelt in old time; by whose power and tyranny the men whose bones, blood, ashes, etc., lay there, were cruelly put to death. But by this place Christian went without much danger, whereat I somewhat wondered; but I have learnt since, that Pagan has been dead many a day; and as for the other, though he be yet alive, he is by reason of age, and also of the many shrewd brushes that he met with in his younger days, grown so crazy, and stiff in his joints, that he can now do little more than sit in his Cave's mouth, grinning at Pilgrims as they go by, and biting his nails, because he cannot come at them.

[3] For instance, Hollar's work, *Cities of Germany*.

say that he was not himself there. Events and speeches seem to grow and dispose themselves within him, independently of his will. Nothing, as a rule, is colder than the characters in an allegory; his are living. Looking upon these details, so small and familiar, illusion gains upon us. Giant Despair, a simple abstraction, becomes as real in his hands as an English gaoler or farmer. He is heard talking by night in bed with his wife Diffidence, who gives him good advice, because here, as in other households, the strong and brutal animal is the least cunning of the two:—

'Then she counselled him that when he arose in the morning he should (take the two prisoners and) beat them without mercy. So when he arose, he getteth him a grievous Crab-tree Cudgel, and goes down into the Dungeon to them, and there first falls to rating of them as if they were dogs, although they gave him never a word of distaste. Then he falls upon them, and beats them fearfully, in such sort, that they were not able to help themselves, or to turn them upon the floor.'[1]

This stick, chosen with a forester's experience, this instinct of rating first and storming to get oneself into trim for knocking down, are traits which attest the sincerity of the narrator, and succeed in persuading the reader. Bunyan has the freedom, the tone, the ease, and the clearness of Homer; he is as close to Homer as an Anabaptist tinker could be to an heroic singer, a creator of gods.

I err; he is nearer. Before the sentiment of the sublime, inequalities are levelled. The depth of emotion raises peasant and poet to the same eminence; and here also, allegory stands the peasant in stead. It alone, in the absence of ecstasy, can paint heaven; for it does not pretend to paint it: expressing it by a figure, it declares it invisible, as a glowing sun at which we cannot look full, and whose image we observe in a mirror or a stream. The ineffable world thus retains all its mystery; warned by the allegory, we imagine splendours beyond all which it presents to us; we feel behind the beauties which are opened to us, the infinite which is concealed; and the ideal city, vanishing as soon as it appears, ceases to resemble the big Whitehall imagined for Jehovah by Milton. Read the arrival of the pilgrims in the celestial land. Saint Theresa has nothing more beautiful:—

'Yea, here they heard continually the singing of Birds, and saw every day the Flowers appear in the earth, and heard the voice of the Turtle in the land. In this Country the Sun shineth night and day. . . . Here they were within sight of the City they were going to, also here met them some of the inhabitants thereof; for in this land the Shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the borders of Heaven. . . . Here they heard voices from out of the City, loud voices, saying, "Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold thy salvation cometh, behold his reward is with him!" Here all the inhabitants of the Country called them "The holy People, The redeemed of the Lord, Sought out, etc."

'Now as they walked in this land, they had more rejoicing than in parts more

[1] *Pilgrim's Progress*, First Part, p. 126.

remote from the Kingdom to which they were bound; and drawing near to the City, they had yet a more perfect view thereof. It was builded of Pearls and Precious Stones, also the Street thereof was paved with Gold; so that by reason of the natural glory of the City, and the reflection of the Sun-beams upon it, Christian with desire fell sick; Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease. Wherefore here they lay by it a while, crying out because of their pangs, "If you see my Beloved, tell him that I am sick of love."[1] . . .

'They therefore went up here with much agility and speed, though the foundation upon which the City was framed was higher than the Clouds. They therefore went up through the Regions of the Air, sweetly talking as they went, being comforted, because they safely got over the River, and had such glorious Companions to attend them.

'The talk that they had with the Shining Ones was about the glory of the place, who told them that the beauty and glory of it was inexpressible. There, said they, is the Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of Angels, and the Spirits of just men made perfect. You are going now, said they, to the Paradise of God, wherein you shall see the Tree of Life, and eat of the never-fading fruits thereof; and when you come there, you shall have white Robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of Eternity.[2]

'There came out also at this time to meet them, several of the King's Trumpeters, cloathed in white and shining Raiment, who with melodious noises and loud, made even the Heavens to echo with their sound. These Trumpeters saluted Christian and his fellow with ten thousand welcomes from the World, and this they did with shouting and sound of Trumpet.

'This done, they compassed them round on every side; some went before, some behind, and some on the right hand, some on the left (as 't were to guard them through the upper Regions), continually sounding as they went with melodious noise, in notes on high; so that the very sight was to them that could behold it, as if Heaven itself was come down to meet them. . . .

'And now were these two men as 't were in Heaven before they came at it, being swallowed up with the sight of Angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here also they had the City itself in view, and they thought they heard all the Bells therein ring to welcome them thereto. But above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever and ever. Oh, by what tongue or pen can their glorious joy be expressed!'[3] . . .

'Now I saw in my Dream that these two men went in at the Gate; and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured, and they had Raiment put on that shone like Gold. There was also that met them with Harps and Crowns, and gave them to them, the Harps to praise withal, and the Crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my Dream that all the Bells in the City rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them, "Enter ye into the joy of your Lord." I also heard the men themselves, that they sang with a loud voice, saying, "Blessing, Honour, Glory, and Power, be to him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

'Now, just as the Gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold, the City shone like the Sun; the Streets also were paved with Gold,

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[1] *Pilgrim's Progress*, First Part, p. 174.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 179.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 182.

and in them walked many men, with Crowns on their heads, Palms in their hands, and golden Harps to sing praises withal.

'There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord." And after that they shut up the Gates. Which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.'[1]

He was imprisoned for twelve years and a half; in his dungeon he made wire snares to support himself and his family; he died at the age of sixty in 1688. At the same time Milton lingered obscure and blind. The last two poets of the Reformation thus survived, amid the classical coldness which then dried up English literature, and the social excess which then corrupted English morals. 'Shorn hypocrites, the psalm-singers, gloomy bigots,' such were the names by which men who reformed the manners and renewed the constitution of England were insulted. But oppressed and insulted as they were, their work continued of itself and without noise below the earth; for the ideal which they had raised was, after all, that which the clime suggested and the race demanded. Gradually Puritanism began to approach the world, and the world to approach Puritanism. The Restoration was to fall into evil odour, the Revolution was to come, and under the insensible progress of national sympathy, as well as under the incessant effort of public reflection, parties and doctrines were to rally around a free and moral Protestantism.

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[1] *Pilgrim's Progress*, First Part, p. 183, etc.

CHAPTER VI.

Milton.

I. General idea of his mind and character — Family — Education — Studies — Travels—Return to England.

II. Effects of a concentrated and solitary character—Austerity—Inexperience—Marriage—Children—Domestic Troubles.

III. Combative energy—Polemic against the bishops—Against the king—Enthusiasm and sternness—Theories on government, church, and education

IV —Stoicism and virtue—Old age, occupations, person.

IV. Milton as a prose-writer—Changes during three centuries in appearances and ideas—Heaviness of his logic—*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*—Heavy humour—*Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence*—Clumsiness of discussion—*Defensio Populi Anglicani*—Violence of his animosities—*The Reason of Church Government*—*Eikonoklastes*—Liberality of doctrines—*Of Reformation*—*Areopagitica*—Style—Breadth of eloquence—Wealth of imagery—Lyric sublimity of diction.

V. Milton as a poet—How he approaches and is distinct from the poets of the Renaissance—How he gives poetry a moral tone—Profane poems—*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*—*Comus*—*Lycidas*—Religious poems—*Paradise Lost*—Conditions of a genuine epic—They are not to be met with in the age or in the poet—Comparison of Adam and Eve with an English family—Comparison of God and the angels to a monarch's court—The rest of the poem—Comparison between the sentiments of Satan and the republican passions—Lyrical and moral character of the scenery—Loftiness and sense of the moral ideas—Situation of the poet and the poem between two ages—Composition of his genius and his work.

ON the borders of the licentious Renaissance which was drawing to a close, and of the exact school of poetry which was springing up, between the monotonous conceits of Cowley and the correct gallantries of Waller, appeared a mighty and superb mind, prepared by logic and enthusiasm for eloquence and the epic style; liberal, Protestant, a moralist and a poet; adorning the cause of Algernon Sidney and Locke with the inspiration of Spenser and Shakspeare; the heir of a poetical age, the precursor of an austere age, holding his place between the epoch of unbiassed dreamland and the epoch of practical action; like his own Adam, who, entering a hostile earth, heard behind him, in the closed Eden, the dying strains of heaven.

John Milton was not one of those fevered souls, void of self-command, whose rapture takes them by fits, whom a sickly sensibility drives

for ever to the extreme of sorrow or joy, whose pliability prepares them to produce a variety of characters, whose inquietude condemns them to paint the insanity and contradictions of passion. Vast knowledge, close logic, and grand passion: these were his marks. His mind was lucid, his imagination limited. He was incapable of disturbed emotion or of transformation. He conceived the loftiest of ideal beauties, but he conceived only one. He was not born for the drama, but for the ode. He does not create souls, but constructs arguments and experiences emotions. Emotions and arguments, all the forces and actions of his soul, assemble and are arranged beneath a unique sentiment, that of the sublime; and the broad river of lyric poetry streams from him, impetuous, with even flow, splendid as a cloth of gold.

I.

This dominant sense constituted the greatness and the firmness of his character. Against external fluctuations he found a refuge in himself; and the ideal city which he had built in his soul endured, impregnable to all assaults. It was too beautiful, this inner city, for him to wish to leave it; it was too solid to be destroyed. He believed in the sublime with the whole force of his nature, and the whole authority of his logic; and with him, the cultivated reason strengthened by its tests the suggestions of the primitive instinct. With this double armour, man can advance firmly through life. He who is always feeding himself with demonstrations is capable of believing, willing, persevering in belief and will; he does not turn aside to every event and every passion, as that fickle and pliable being whom we call a poet; he remains at rest in fixed principles. He is capable of embracing a cause, and of continuing attached to it, whatever may happen, spite of all, to the end. No seduction, no emotion, no accident, no change alters the stability of his conviction or the lucidity of his knowledge. On the first day, on the last day, during the whole time, he preserves intact the entire system of his clear ideas, and the logical vigour of his brain sustains the manly vigour of his heart. When at length, as here, this close logic is employed in the service of noble ideas, enthusiasm is added to constancy. Man holds his opinions not only as true, but as sacred. He fights for them, not only as a soldier, but as a priest. He is impassioned, devoted, religious, heroic. Rarely is such a mixture seen; but it was clearly seen in Milton.

He was of a family in which courage, moral nobility, the love of art, were present to whisper the most beautiful and eloquent words around his cradle. His mother was a most exemplary woman, well known through all the neighbourhood for her benevolence.[1] His

[1] Matre probatissimâ et eleemosynis per viciniam potissimum nota.—*Defensio Secunda. Life of Milton*, by Keightley.

father, a student of Christ Church, and disinherited as a Protestant, had alone made his fortune, and, amidst his occupations as a scrivener or writer, had preserved the taste for letters, being unwilling to give up 'his liberal and intelligent tastes to the extent of becoming altogether a slave to the world;' he wrote verses, was an excellent musician, one of the best composers in his time; he chose Cornelius Jansen to paint his son's portrait when in his tenth year, and gave his child the widest and fullest literary education.[1] Let the reader try to picture this child, in the street inhabited by merchants, in this citizen-like and scholarly, religious and poetical family, whose manners were regular and their aspirations lofty, where they set the psalms to music, and wrote madrigals in honour of Oriana the queen,[2] where music, letters, painting, all the adornments of the beauty-loving Renaissance, decorated the sustained gravity, the hard-working honesty, the deep Christianity of the Reformation. All Milton's genius springs from this; he carried the splendour of the Renaissance into the earnestness of the Reformation, the magnificence of Spenser into the severity of Calvin, and, with his family, found himself at the confluence of the two civilisations which he combined. Before he was ten years old he had a learned tutor, 'a Puritan, who cut his hair short;' after that he went to Saint Paul's School, then to the University of Cambridge, that he might be instructed in 'polite literature;' and at the age of twelve he worked, in spite of his weak eyes and headaches, until midnight and even later. His John the Baptist, a character resembling himself, says:

> 'When I was yet a child, no childish play
> To me was pleasing; all my mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do,
> What might be public good; myself I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things.'[3]

In fact, at school, then at Cambridge, then with his father, he was strengthening and preparing himself with all his power, free from all blame, and loved by all good men; traversing the vast fields of Greek and Latin literature, not only the great writers, but all the writers, down to the half of the middle-age; and simultaneously the ancient Hebrew, Syriac and rabbinical Hebrew, French and Spanish, the old English literature, all the Italian literature, with such zeal and profit that he wrote Italian and Latin verse and prose like an Italian or a Roman; beyond this, music, mathematics, theology, and much besides. A serious thought regulated this great toil. 'The church, to whose

[1] 'My father destined me while yet a little child for the study of humane letters.'—*Life*, by Masson, 1859, i. 51.

[2] Queen Elizabeth.

[3] *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Cleveland, 1865, *Paradise Regained*, Book i. *v.* 201–206.

service, by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child, and in mine own resolutions; till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure, or split his faith; I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing.'[1]

He refused to be a priest from the same feelings that he had wished it: the desire and the renunciation all sprang from the same source—a fixed resolve to act nobly. Falling back into the life of a layman, he continued to cultivate and perfect himself, studying with passion and with method, but without pedantry or rigour; nay, rather, after his master Spenser, in *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, he set forth in sparkling and variegated dress the wealth of mythology, nature, and fancy; then, sailing for the land of science and beauty, he visited Italy, made the acquaintance of Grotius and Galileo, sought the society of the learned, the men of letters, the men of the world, heard the musicians, steeped himself in all the beauties stored up by the Renaissance at Florence and Rome. Everywhere his learning, his fine Italian and Latin style, secured him the friendship and attachment of scholars, so that, on his return to Florence, he 'was as well received as if he had returned to his native country.' He collected books and music, which he sent to England, and thought of traversing Sicily and Greece, those two homes of ancient letters and arts. Of all the flowers that opened to the Southern sun under the influence of the two great Paganisms, he gathered freely the sweetest and the most exquisite of odours, but without staining himself with the mud which surrounded them. 'I call the Deity to witness,' he wrote later, 'that in all those places in which vice meets with so little discouragement, and is practised with so little shame, I never once deviated from the paths of integrity and virtue, and perpetually reflected that, though my conduct might escape the notice of men, it could not elude the inspection of God.'[2]

Amid the licentious gallantries and inane sonnets such as those of the Cicisbei and Academicians lavished forth, he had retained his sublime idea of poetry: he thought to choose a heroic subject from ancient English history; and as he says, 'I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the

[1] Milton's *Prose Works*, ed. St. John, 5 vols., 1848, *The Reason of Church Government*, ii. 482.

[2] *Ibid.*, *Second Defence of the People of England*, i. 257. See also his *Italian Sonnets*, with their religious sentiment.

experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.'[1] Amidst all, he loved Dante and Petrarch for their purity, telling himself that 'if unchastity in a woman, whom St. Paul terms the glory of man, be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man, who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable.'[2] He thought 'that every free and gentle spirit, without that oath, ought to be born a knight,' for the practice and defence of chastity, and he kept himself virgin till his marriage. Whatever the temptation might be, whatever the attraction or fear, it found him equally opposed and equally firm. From a sense of gravity and propriety he avoided all religious disputes; but if his own creed were attacked, he defended it 'without any reserve or fear,' even in Rome, before the Jesuits who plotted against him, within a few paces of the Inquisition and the Vatican. Perilous duty, instead of driving him away, attracted him. When the Revolution began to threaten, he returned, drawn by conscience, as a soldier who hastens to danger at the noise of arms, convinced, as he himself tells us, that it was a shame to him leisurely to spend his life abroad, and for his own pleasure, whilst his fellow-countrymen were striving for their liberty. In battle he appeared in the front ranks as a volunteer, courting danger everywhere. Throughout his education and throughout his youth, in his profane readings and his sacred studies, in his acts and his maxims, already a ruling and permanent thought grew manifest—the resolution to develop and unfold within him the ideal man.

II.

Two special powers lead mankind—impulse and idea: the one influencing sensitive, unfettered, poetical souls, capable of transformations, like Shakspeare; the other governing active, combative, heroic souls, capable of immutability, like Milton. The first are sympathetic and effusive; the second are concentrative and reserved.[3] The first give themselves up, the others withhold themselves. These, by reliance and sociability, with an artistic instinct and a sudden imitative comprehension, involuntarily take the tone and disposition of the men and things which surround them, and an immediate counterpoise is effected between the inner and the outer man. Those, by mistrust and rigidity, with a combative instinct and a quick reference to rule, become naturally thrown back upon themselves, and in their narrow retirement no longer feel the solicitations and contradictions of their surroundings.

[1] Milton's Works, *Apology for Smectymnuus*, iii. 117.

[2] *Ibid.* 122. See also his *Treatise on Divorce*, which shows clearly Milton's meaning.

[3] 'Though Christianity had been but slightly taught me, yet a certain reservedness of natural disposition, and moral discipline, learnt out of the noblest philosophy, was enough to keep me in disdain of far less incontinences than this of the bordello.'—*Apology for Smectymnuus*, iii. p. 122.

They have formed a model, and thenceforth this model like a watchword restrains or urges them on. Like all powers destined to have sway, the inner idea grows and absorbs to its use the rest of their being. They bury it in themselves by meditation, they nourish it with reasoning, they put it in communication with the chain of all their doctrines and all their experiences; so that when a temptation assails them, it is not an isolated principle which it attacks, but it encounters the whole combination of their belief, an infinitely ramified combination, and too strong for a sensible seduction to tear asunder. Thus a man is by habit upon his guard; the combative attitude is habitual to him, and he stands erect, firm in the pride of his courage and the inveteracy of his determination.

A soul thus fortified is like a diver in his bell;[1] it passes through life as he passes through the sea, unstained but isolated. On his return to England, Milton fell back among his books, and received a few pupils, from whom he exacted, as from himself, continuous toil, serious reading, a frugal diet, a strict behaviour; the life of a recluse, almost of a monk. Suddenly, in a month, after a country visit, he married.[2] A few weeks afterwards, his wife returned to her father's house, would not return, took no notice of his letters, and sent back his messenger with scorn. The two characters had come into collision. Nothing displeases women more than an austere and self-contained character. They see that they have no hold upon it; its dignity awes them, its pride repels, its preoccupations keep them aloof; they feel themselves of less value, neglected for general interests or speculative curiosities; judged, moreover, and that after an inflexible rule; at most regarded with condescension, as a sort of less reasonable and inferior being, shut out from the equality which they look for, and the love which alone can recompense to them the loss of equality. The 'priest' character is made for solitude; the tact, abandon, charm, pleasantness, and sweetness necessary to all companionship, is wanting to it; we admire him, but we go no further, especially if, like Milton's wife, we are somewhat dull and commonplace,[3] adding mediocrity of intellect to the repugnance of our hearts. He had, so his biographers say, a certain gravity of nature, or severity of mind which would not condescend to petty things, but kept him in the clouds, in a region which is not that of the household. He was accused of being harsh, choleric; and certainly he stood upon his manly

[1] An expression of Jean Paul Richter. See an excellent article on Milton in the *Nat. Review*, July 1859.

[2] 1643, at the age of 35.

[3] 'Mute and spiritless mate.' 'The bashful muteness of the virgin may oftentimes hide all the unloveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation.' 'A man shall find himself bound fast to an image of earth and phlegm, with whom he looked to be the copartner of a sweet and delightsome society.'—*Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.* A pretty woman will say in reply: I cannot love a man who carries his head like the Sacrament.

dignity, his authority as a husband, and was not so greatly esteemed, respected, studied, as he thought he deserved to be. In short, he passed the day amongst his books, and the rest of the time his heart lived in an abstracted and sublime world of which few wives catch a glimpse, his wife least of all. He had, in fact, chosen like a student, the more at random because his former life had been of 'a well-governed and wise appetite.' Equally like a man of the closet, he resented her flight, being the more irritated because the world's ways were unknown to him. Without dread of ridicule, and with the sternness of a speculative man suddenly in collision with actual life, he wrote treatises on *Divorce*, signed them with his name, dedicated them to Parliament, held himself divorced, *de facto* because his wife refused to return, *de jure* because he had four texts of Scripture for it; whereupon he paid court to a young lady, and suddenly, seeing his wife on her knees and weeping, forgave her, took her back, renewed the dry and sad marriage-tie, not profiting by experience, but on the other hand fated to contract two other unions, the last with a wife thirty years younger than himself. Other parts of his domestic life were neither better managed nor happier. He had taken his daughters for secretaries, and made them read languages which they did not understand,—a repelling task, of which they bitterly complained. In return, he accused them of being 'undutiful and unkind,' of neglecting him, not caring whether they left him alone, of conspiring with the servants to rob him in their purchases, of stealing his books, so that they would have disposed of the whole of them. Mary, the second, hearing one day that he was going to be married, said that his marriage was no news; the best news would be his death. An incredible speech, and one which throws a strange light on the miseries of this family. Neither circumstances nor nature had created him for happiness.

III.

They had created him for strife, and from his return to England he had thrown himself heartily into it, armed with logic, indignation, and learning, protected by conviction and conscience. When 'the liberty of speech was no longer subject to control, all mouths began to be opened against the bishops. . . . I saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty; that the foundation was laying for the deliverance of man from the yoke of slavery and superstition; . . . and as I had from my youth studied the distinction between religious and civil rights, . . . I determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object.'[1] And thereupon he wrote his *Reformation in England*,[2] jeering at and attacking with

[1] *Second Defence of the People of England*, i. 257.

[2] In 1641. *Of Reformation in England, and the Causes that hitherto have*

haughtiness and scorn the prelacy and its defenders. Refuted and attacked in turn, he doubled his bitterness, and crushed those whom he had beaten. Transported to the limits of his creed, and like a knight making a rush, and who pierces with a dash the whole line of battle, he hurled himself upon the prince, concluded the abolition of Royalty as well as the overthrow of the Episcopacy; and one month after the death of Charles I., justified his execution, replied to the *Eikon Basilike*, then to Salmasius' *Defence of the King*, with incomparable breadth of style and scorn, like a soldier, like an apostle, like a man who everywhere feels the superiority of his science and logic, who wishes to make it felt, who proudly treads down and crushes his adversaries as ignoramuses, inferior minds, base hearts.[1] 'Kings most commonly,' he says, at the beginning of the *Eikonoklastes*,[2] 'though strong in legions, are but weak at argument; as they who ever have accustomed from their cradle to use their will only as their right hand, their reason always as their left. Whence unexpectedly constrained to that kind of combat, they prove but weak and puny adversaries.' Yet, for love of those who suffer themselves to be overcome by this dazzling name of royalty, he consents to 'take up King Charles' gauntlet,' and bangs him with it in a style calculated to make the imprudent ones who had thrown it down, repent. Far from recoiling at the accusation of murder, he accepts and boasts of it. He vaunts the regicide, sets it on a triumphal car, decks it in all the light of heaven. He relates with the tone of a judge, 'how a most potent king, after he had trampled upon the laws of the nation, and given a shock to its religion, and began to rule at his own will and pleasure, was at last subdued in the field by his own subjects, who had undergone a long slavery under him; how afterwards he was cast into prison, and when he gave no ground, either by words or actions, to hope better things of him, was finally by the supreme council of the kingdom condemned to die, and beheaded before the very gates of the royal palace. . . . For what king's majesty sitting upon an exalted throne, ever shone so brightly, as that of the people of England then did, when, shaking off that old superstition, which had prevailed a long time, they gave judgment upon the king himself, or rather upon an enemy who had been their king, caught as it were in a net by his own laws, (who alone of all mortals challenged to himself impunity by a divine right,) and scrupled not to inflict the same punishment upon him, being guilty, which he would have inflicted upon any other?'[3] After having justi-

hindered it. A Treatise of Prelatical Episcopacy. The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy. Apology for Smectymnuus.

[1] *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. Eikonoklastes. Defensio Populi Anglicani. Defensio Secunda. Authoris pro se defensio. Responsio.*

[2] Milton's *Works*, vol. i. p. 308.

[3] Preface to the *Defence of the People of England*, i. p. 3.

fied the execution, he sanctified it; consecrated it by decrees of heaven when he had authorised it by the laws of the world; from the support of Law he transferred it to the support of God. This is the God who 'uses to throw down proud and unruly kings, . . . and utterly to extirpate them and all their family. By his manifest impulse being set at work to recover our almost lost liberty, following him as our guide, and adoring the impresses of his divine power manifested upon all occasions, we went on in no obscure but an illustrious passage, pointed out and made plain to us by God himself.'[1] Here the reasoning ends with a song of triumph, and enthusiasm breaks out through the mail of the warrior. Such he displayed himself in all his actions and in all his doctrines. The solid files of bristling and well-ordered arguments which he disposed in battle-array were changed in his heart in the moment of triumph into glorious processions of crowned and resplendent hymns. He was transported by them, even to self-illusion, and lived thus alone with the sublime, like a warrior-pontiff, who in his stiff armour, or his glittering stole, stands face to face with truth. Thus absorbed in strife and in his priesthood, he lived out of the world, as blind to palpable facts as he was protected against the seductions of the senses, placed above the stains and the lessons of experience, as incapable of leading men as of yielding to them. There was nothing in him akin to the devices and delays of the statesman, the crafty schemer, who pauses on his way, experimentalises, with eyes fixed on what may turn up, who gauges what is possible, and employs logic for practical purposes. He was speculative and chimerical. Locked up in his own ideas, he sees but them, is attracted but by them. Is he pleading against the bishops? He would extirpate them at once, without hesitation; he demands that the Presbyterian worship shall be at once established, without forethought, contrivance, hesitation. It is the command of God, it is the duty of every faithful man; beware how you trifle with God or temporise with faith. Concord,

[1] *Defence*, i. 4. This defence is in Latin. Milton ends the *Defence* thus:—'He (God) has gloriously delivered you, the first of nations, from the two greatest mischiefs of this life, and most pernicious to virtue, tyranny and superstition; he has endued you with greatness of mind to be the first of mankind, who after having conquered their own king, and having had him delivered into their hands, have not scrupled to condemn him judicially, and, pursuant to that sentence of condemnation, to put him to death. After the performing so glorious an action as this, you ought to do nothing that is mean and little, not so much as to think of, much less to do, anything but what is great and sublime. Which to attain to, this is your only way: as you have subdued your enemies in the field, so to make appear, that unarmed, and in the highest outward peace and tranquillity, you of all mankind are best able to subdue ambition, avarice, the love of riches, and can best avoid the corruptions that prosperity is apt to introduce, (which generally subdue and triumph over other nations,) to shew as great justice, temperance, and moderation in the maintaining your liberty, as you have shewn courage in freeing yourselves from slavery.'

gentleness, liberty, piety, he sees a whole swarm of virtues issue from this new worship. Let the king fear nothing from it, his power will be all the stronger. Twenty thousand democratic assemblies will take care that his rights be not infringed. These ideas make us smile. We recognise the party-man, who, on the verge of the Restoration, when 'the whole multitude was mad with desire for a king,' published *A Ready and Easy Way to establish a Free Commonwealth*, and described his method at length. We recognise the theologian who, to obtain a law of divorce, only appealed to Scripture, and aimed at transforming the civil constitution of a people by changing the accepted sense of a verse. With closed eyes, sacred text in hand, he advances from consequence to consequence, trampling upon the prejudices, inclinations, habits, wants of men, as if a reasoning or religious spirit were the whole man, as if evidence always created belief, as if belief always resulted in practice, as if, in the struggle of doctrines, truth or justice gave doctrines the victory and sovereignty. To cap all, he sketched out a treatise on education, in which he proposed to teach each pupil every science, every art, and, what is more, every virtue. 'He who had the art and proper eloquence . . . might in a short space gain them to an incredible diligence and courage, . . . infusing into their young breasts such an ingenuous and noble ardour as would not fail to make many of them renowned and matchless men.' Milton had taught for many years and at various times. To retain such deceptions after such experiences, one must be insensible to experience or doomed to illusions.

But his obstinacy constituted his power, and the inner constitution, which closed his mind to instruction, armed his heart against weaknesses. With men generally, the source of devotion dries up when in contact with life. Gradually, by dint of frequenting the world, we come to acquire its tone. We do not choose to be dupes, and to abstain from the liberty which others allow themselves; we relax our youthful strictness; we even smile, attributing it to our heat of blood; we come to know our own motives, and cease to find ourselves sublime. We end by taking it calmly, and we see the world wag, only trying to avoid shocks, picking up here and there a few little harmless pleasures. Not so Milton. He lived complete and untainted to the end, without loss of heart or weakness; experience could not instruct nor misfortune depress him; he endured all, and repented of nothing. He lost his sight, willingly, by writing, though ill, and against the prohibition of his doctors, to justify the English people against the invectives of Salmasius. He saw the funeral of the Republic, the proscription of his doctrines, the defamation of his honour. Around him rioted the disgust of liberty, the enthusiasm of slavery. A whole people threw itself at the feet of a young incapable and treacherous libertine. The glorious leaders of the Puritan faith were condemned, executed, cut down alive from the gallows, quartered amidst insults; others, whom death had saved from the hangman, were dug up and exposed on the gibbet;

others, exiles in foreign lands, lived under the menaces and outrages of royalist arms; others again, more unfortunate, had sold their cause for money and titles, and sat amid the executioners of their former friends. The most pious and austere citizens of England filled the prisons, or wandered in poverty and opprobrium; and gross vice, shamelessly seated on the throne, stirred up around it the riot of unbridled licentious lusts and sensualities. Milton himself had been constrained to hide; his books had been burned by the hand of the hangman; even after the general act of indemnity he was imprisoned; when set at liberty, he lived in the expectancy of assassination, for private fanaticism might seize the weapon relinquished by public revenge. Other smaller misfortunes came to aggravate by their stings the great wounds which afflicted them. Confiscations, a bankruptcy, finally, the great fire of London, had robbed him of three-fourths of his fortune;[1] his daughters neither esteemed nor respected him; he sold his books, knowing that his family could not profit by them after his death; and amidst so many private and public miseries, he continued calm. Instead of repudiating what he had done, he gloried in it; instead of being cast down, he increased in firmness. He says, in his 17th sonnet:

'Cyriack, this three years day these eyes, though clear,
To outward view, of blemish or of spot,
Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot;
Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,
Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied
In liberty's defence, my noble task,
Of which all Europe rings from side to side.
This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask
Content though blind, had I no better guide.'[2]

That thought was indeed his guide; he was 'armed in himself,' and that 'breastplate of diamond'[3] which had protected the strong man against the wounds in battle, protected the old man against the temptations and doubts of defeat and adversity.

IV.

Milton lived in a small house in London, or in the country, in Buck-

[1] A scrivener caused him to lose £2000. At the Restoration he was refused payment of £2000 which he had put into the Excise Office, and deprived of an estate of £50 a year, bought by him from the property of the Chapter of Westminster. His house was burnt in the great fire. When he died he only left £1500, including the produce of his library.

[2] 1552, Milton's *Poetical Works*, ed. Cleveland, 1865, *Sonnet* 17.

[3] *Italian Sonnets.*

inghamshire, at the foot of a high green hill, published his *History of Britain*, his *Logic*, a *Treatise on True Religion and Heresy*, meditated his great *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*. Of all consolations, work is the most fortifying and the most healthy, because it solaces a man not by bringing him ease, but by requiring efforts. Every morning he had a chapter of the Bible read to him in Hebrew, and remained for some time in silence, grave, in order to meditate on what he had heard. He never went to a place of worship. Independent in religion as in all else, he was sufficient to himself; finding in no sect the marks of the true church, he prayed to God alone, without needing others' help. He studied till mid-day; then, after an hour's exercise, he played the organ or the bass-violin. Then he resumed his studies till six, and in the evening enjoyed the society of his friends. When any one came to visit him, he was usually found in a room hung with old green hangings, seated in an arm-chair, and dressed quietly in black; his complexion was pale, says one of his visitors, but not sallow; his hands and feet were gouty; his hair, of a light brown, was parted in the midst, and fell in long curls; his eyes, grey and clear, showed no sign of blindness. He had been very beautiful in his youth, and his English cheeks, once delicate as a young girl's, retained their colour almost to the end. His face, we are told, was pleasing; his straight and manly gait bore witness to intrepidity and courage. Something great and proud breathes out yet from all his portraits; and certainly few men have done such honour to their kind. Thus expired this noble life, like a setting sun, bright and calm. Amid so many trials, a pure and lofty joy, altogether worthy of him, had been granted to him: the poet, buried under the Puritan, had reappeared, more sublime than ever, to give to Christianity its second Homer. The dazzling dreams of his youth and the reminiscences of his ripe age were found in him, side by side with Calvinistic dogmas and the visions of John, to create the Protestant epic of damnation and grace; and the vastness of primitive horizons, the flames of the infernal dungeon, the splendours of the celestial court, opened to the inner eye of the soul unknown regions beyond the sights which the eyes of flesh had lost.

V.

I have before me the formidable volume in which, some time after Milton's death, his prose works were collected.[1] What a book! The chairs creak when you place it upon them, and a man who had turned its leaves over for an hour, would have less pain in his head than in

[1] The titles of Milton's chief writings in prose are these:—*History of Reformation; The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy; Animadversions upon the Remonstrants' Defence; Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce; Tetrachordon; Tractate on Education; Areopagitica; Tenure of Kings and Magistrates; Eikonoklastes; History of Britain; Thesaurus Linguæ Latinæ; History of Moscovia; De Logicæ Arte.*

his arm. As the book, so were the men: from the mere outsides we might gather some notion of the controversialists and theologians whose doctrines they contain. Yet we must conclude that the author was eminently learned, elegant, travelled, philosophic, and of high worldly culture for the times. We think involuntarily of the portraits of the theologians of the age, severe faces engraved on steel by the hard tool of masters, whose square brows and steady eyes stand out in startling prominence against the black oak panel. We compare them to modern countenances, in which the delicate and complex features seem to shudder at the alternate contact of hardly begun sensations and innumerable ideas. We try to imagine the heavy Latin education, the physical exercises, the rude treatment, the rare ideas, the imposed dogmas, which once occupied, oppressed, fortified, and hardened the young; and we might fancy ourselves looking at an anatomy of megatheria and mastodons, reconstructed by Cuvier.

The race of living men is changed. Our mind fails us now-a-days at the idea of this greatness and this barbarism; but we discover that barbarism was then the cause of greatness. As in other times we might have seen, in the primitive slime and among the colossal ferns, ponderous monsters slowly wind their scaly backs, and tear the flesh from one another's sides with their misshapen talons; so now, at a distance, from the height of our calm civilisation, we see the battles of the theologians, who, armed with syllogisms, bristling with texts, covered one another with filth, and laboured to devour each other.

Milton fought in the front rank, pre-ordained to barbarism and greatness by his individual nature and surrounding manners, capable of displaying in high prominence the logic, style, and spirit of his age. It is drawing-room life which trims men into shape: the society of ladies, the lack of serious interests, idleness, vanity, security, are needed to bring men to elegance, urbanity, fine and light humour, to teach the desire to please, the fear to become wearisome, a perfect clearness, a finished precision, the art of insensible transitions and delicate tact, the taste for suitable images, continual ease, and choice diversity. Seek nothing like this in Milton. The old scholastic system was not far off; it still weighed on those who were destroying it. Under this secular armour discussion proceeded pedantically, with measured steps. The first thing was to propound a thesis; and Milton writes, in large characters, at the head of his *Treatise on Divorce*, 'that indisposition, unfitness, or contrariety of mind, arising from a cause in nature unchangeable, hindering, and ever likely to hinder the main benefits of conjugal society, which are solace and peace, is a greater reason of divorce than natural frigidity, especially if there be no children, and that there be mutual consent.' And then follow, legion after legion, the disciplined army of the arguments. Battalion after battalion they pass by, numbered very distinctly. There is a dozen of them together, each with its title in clear characters, and the little brigade of sub-

divisions which it commands. Sacred texts hold the post of honour. They are discussed word by word, the substantive after the adjective, the verb after the substantive, the preposition after the verb; interpretations, authorities, illustrations, are summoned up, and ranged between palisades of new divisions. And yet there is a lack of order, the question is not reduced to a single idea; we cannot see our way; proofs succeed proofs without logical sequence; we are rather tired out than convinced. We remember that the author speaks to Oxford men, lay or cleric, trained in pretended discussions, capable of obstinate attention, accustomed to digest indigestible books. They are at home in this thorny thicket of scholastic brambles; they beat a path through, somewhat at hazard, hardened against the hurts which repulse us, and not giving a thought to the daylight which we require.

With such ponderous reasoners, you must not look for wit. Wit is the nimbleness of victorious reason: here, because all is powerful, all is heavy. When Milton wishes to joke, he looks like one of Cromwell's pikemen, who, entering a room to dance, should fall upon the floor, and that with the extra momentum of his armour. Few things could be more stupid than his *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants' Defence.* At the end of an argument his adversary concludes with this specimen of theological wit: 'In the meanwhile see, brethren, how you have with Simon fished all night, and caught nothing.' And Milton boastfully replies: 'If we, fishing with Simon the apostle, can catch nothing, see what you can catch with Simon Magus; for all his hooks and fishing implements he bequeathed among you.' Here a great savage laugh would break out. The spectators saw a charm in this way of insinuating that his adversary was simoniacal. A little before, the latter says: 'Tell me, is this liturgy good or evil?' Answer: 'It is evil. Repair the acheloian horn of your dilemma, how you can, against the next push.' The doctors wondered at the fine mythological simile, and rejoiced to see the adversary so neatly compared to an ox, a beaten ox, a pagan ox. On the next page the Remonstrant said, by way of a spiritual and mocking reproach: 'Truly, brethren, you have not well taken the height of the pole.' Answer: 'No marvel; there be many more that do not take well the height of your pole, but will take better the declination of your altitude.' Three quips of the same savour follow one upon the other; all this looked pretty. Elsewhere, Salmasius exclaiming 'that the sun itself never beheld a more outrageous action' than the murder of the king, Milton cleverly answers, 'The sun has beheld many things that blind Bernard never saw. But we are content you should mention the sun over and over. And it will be a piece of prudence in you so to do. For though our wickedness does not require it, the coldness of the defence that you are making does.'[1] The marvellous heaviness of these conceits betrays spirits yet entangled in the

[1] *A Defence of the People of England*, i. ch. i. 20.

swaddling-clothes of learning. The Reformation was the inauguration of free thought, but only the inauguration. Criticism was still unborn; authority still presses with a full half of its weight upon the most enfranchised and bold minds. Milton, to prove that it was lawful to put a king to death, quotes Orestes, the laws of Publicola, and the death of Nero. His *History of Britain* is a farrago of all the traditions and fables. Under every circumstance he adduces a text of Scripture for proof; his boldness consists in showing himself a rash grammarian, a valorous commentator. He is blindly Protestant, as others were blindly Catholic. He leaves in its bondage the higher reason, the mother of principles; he has but emancipated a subordinate reason, an interpreter of texts. Like the vast half shapeless creatures, the birth of early times, he is yet but half man and half mud.

Can we expect urbanity here? Urbanity is the elegant dignity which answers insult by calm irony, and respects man whilst piercing a dogma. Milton coarsely knocks his adversary down. A bristling pedant, born from a Greek lexicon and a Syriac grammar, Salmasius had disgorged upon the English people a vocabulary of insults and a folio of quotations. Milton replies to him in the same style; calling him a buffoon, a mountebank, '*professor triobolaris*,' a hired pedant, a nobody, a rogue, a heartless being, a wretch, an idiot, sacrilegious, a slave worthy of rods and a pitchfork. A dictionary of big Latin words passed between them. 'You, who know so many tongues, who read so many books, who write so much about them, you are yet but an ass.' Finding the epithet good, he repeats and sanctifies it. 'O most drivelling of asses, you come ridden by a woman, with the cured heads of bishops whom you had wounded, a little image of the great beast of the Apocalypse!' He ends by calling him savage beast, apostate, and devil. 'Doubt not that you are reserved for the same end as Judas, and that, driven by despair rather than repentance, self-disgusted, you must one day hang yourself, and like your rival, burst asunder in your belly.'[1] We fancy we are listening to the bellowing of two bulls.

They had all a bull's ferocity. Milton hated heartily. He fought with his pen, as the Ironsides with the sword, foot to foot, with a concentrated rancour and a fierce obstinacy. The bishops and the king then suffered for eleven years of despotism. Each one recalled the banishments, confiscations, punishments, the law violated systematically and relentlessly, the liberty of the subject attacked by a well-laid

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[1] Salmasius said of the death of the king: 'Horribilis nuntius aures nostras atroci vulnere, sed magis mentes perculit.' Milton replied: "Profecto nuntius iste horribilis aut gladium multo longiorem eo quem strinxit Petrus habuerit oportet, aut aures istæ auritissimæ fuerint, quas tam longinquo vulnere perculerit.'

'Oratorem tam insipidum et insulium ut ne ex lacrymis quidem ejus mica salis exiguissima possit exprimi.'

'Salmasius nova quadam metamorphosi salmacis factus est.'

plot, Episcopal idolatry imposed on Christian consciences, the faithful preachers driven into the wilds of America, or given up to the executioner and the stocks.[1] Such reminiscences, arising in powerful minds, stamped them with inexpiable hatred, and the writings of Milton bear witness to an acerbity which is now unknown. The impression left by his *Eikonoklastes*[2] is oppressive. Phrase by phrase, harshly, bitterly, the king is refuted and accused to the last, without a minute's respite of accusation, the accused being credited with not the slightest good intention, the slightest excuse, the least show of justice, the accuser never for an instant digressing to or resting upon a general idea. It is a hand-to-hand fight, where every word is a blow, prolonged, obstinate, without dash and without weakness, of a harsh and fixed hostility, where the only thought is how to wound most severely and to kill surely. Against the bishops, who were alive and powerful, his hatred flowed more violently still, and the fierceness of his envenomed metaphors hardly suffices to express it. Milton points to them 'basking in

[1] I copy from Neal's *History of the Puritans*, ii. ch. vii. 367, one of these sorrows and complaints. By the greatness of the outrage the reader can judge of the intensity of hatred:—

'The humble petition of (Dr.) Alexander Leighton, Prisoner in the Fleet,—

'Humbly sheweth,

'That on Feb. 17, 1630, he was apprehended coming from sermon by a high commission warrant, and dragged along the street with bills and staves to London-house. That the gaoler of Newgate being sent for, clapt him in irons, and carried him with a strong power into a loathsome and ruinous dog-hole, full of rats and mice, that had no light but a little grate, and the roof being uncovered, the snow and rain beat in upon him, having no bedding, nor place to make a fire, but the ruins of an old smoaky chimney. In this woeful place he was shut up for fifteen weeks, nobody being suffered to come near him, till at length his wife only was admitted. That the fourth day after his commitment the pursuivant, with a mighty multitude, came to his house to search for jesuits books, and used his wife in such a barbarous and inhuman manner as he is ashamed to express; that they rifled every person and place, holding a pistol to the breast of a child of five years old, threatening to kill him if he did not discover the books; that they broke open chests, presses, boxes, and carried away everything, even houshold stuff, apparel, arms, and other things; that at the end of fifteen weeks he was served with a subpœna, on an information laid against him by Sir Robert Heath, attorney-general, whose dealing with him was full of cruelty and deceit; but he was then sick, and, in the opinion of four physicians, thought to be poisoned, because all his hair and skin came off; that in the height of this sickness the cruel sentence was passed upon him mentioned in the year 1630, and executed Nov. 26 following, when he received thirty-six stripes upon his naked back with a threefold cord, his hands being tied to a stake, and then stood almost two hours in the pillory in the frost and snow, before he was branded in the face, his nose slit, and his ears cut off; that after this he was carried by water to the Fleet, and shut up in such a room that he was never well, and after eight years was turned into the common gaol.'

[2] Answer to the *Eikon Basilike*, a work in the king's favour, and attributed to the king.

the sunny warmth of wealth and protection,' like a brood of foul reptiles. 'The sour leaven of human traditions, mixed in one putrified mass with the poisonous dregs of hypocrisie in the heart of Prelates, . . . is the serpent's egg that will hatch an antichrist wheresoever, and ingender the same monster as big or little as the lump is which breeds him.'

So much coarseness and dulness was as an outer breastplate, the mark and the protection of the superabundant force and life which coursed in those athletic limbs and chests. Now-a-days, the mind being more refined, has become feebler; convictions, being less stern, have become less strong. The attention, delivered from the heavy scholastic logic and scriptural tyranny, is softer. The faith and the will, dissolved by universal tolerance and by the thousand opposing shocks of multiplied ideas, have engendered an exact and refined style, the instrument of conversation and pleasure, and have expelled the poetic and rude style, the weapon of war and enthusiasm. If we have effaced ferocity and folly, we have diminished force and greatness.

Force and greatness are manifested in Milton, displayed in his opinions and his style, the sources of his belief and his talent. This superb reason aspired to unfold itself without shackles; it demanded that reason might unfold itself without shackles. It claimed for humanity what it coveted for itself, and championed every liberty in his every work. From the first he attacked the corpulent bishops,[1] scholastic upstarts, persecutors of free discussion, pensioned tyrants of Christian conscience. Above the clamour of the Protestant Revolution, his voice was heard thundering against tradition and obedience. He sourly railed at the pedantic theologians, devoted worshippers of old texts, who took a mouldy martyrology for a solid argument, and answered a demonstration with a quotation. He declared that most of the Fathers were turbulent and babbling intriguers, that they were not worth more collectively than individually, that their councils were but a pack of underhand intrigues and vain disputes; he rejected their authority[2] and their example, and set up logic as the only interpreter of Scripture. A Puritan as against bishops, an Independent as against Presbyterians, he was always the master of his thought and the inventor of his own faith. No one better loved, practised, and praised the free and bold use of reason. He exercised it even rashly and scandalously. He revolted against custom, the illegitimate queen of human belief, the born and relentless enemy of truth, raised his hand against marriage, and demanded divorce in the case of contrariety of tempers. He declared that 'error supports custom, custom countenances error; and these two between them, . . . with the numerous and vulgar train of their followers, . . . envy and cry down the

[1] *Of Reformation in England*, ii.

[2] 'The loss of Cicero's works alone, or those of Livy, could not be repaired by all the Fathers of the church.'—*Areopagitica.*

industry of free reasoning, under the terms of humour and innovation.'[1] He showed that truth 'never comes into the world, but like a bastard, to the ignominy of him that brought her forth; till time, the midwife rather than the mother of truth, have washed and salted the infant, declared her legitimate.'[2] He held fast by three or four writings against the flood of blame and anathemas, and dared even more; he attacked before Parliament censure, its own work; he spoke as a man who is wounded and oppressed, for whom a public prohibition is a personal outrage, who is himself fettered by the fetters of the nation. He does not want the pen of a paid 'licenser' to insult by its approval the first page of his book. He hates this ignorant and imperious hand, and claims liberty of writing as he claims liberty of thought:—

'What advantage is it to be a man, over it is to be a boy at school, if we have only escaped the ferula, to come under the fescue of an imprimatur? if serious and elaborate writings, as if they were no more than the theme of a grammar-lad under his pedagogue, must not be uttered without the cursory eyes of a temporizing and extemporizing licenser? He who is not trusted with his own actions, his drift not being known to be evil, and standing to the hazard of law and penalty, has no great argument to think himself reputed in the commonwealth wherein he was born for other than a fool or a foreigner. When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done, he takes himself to be informed in what he writes, as well as any that wrote before him; if in this, the most consummate act of his fidelity and ripeness, no years, no industry, no former proof of his abilities, can bring him to that state of maturity, as not to be still mistrusted and suspected, unless he carry all his considerate diligence, all his midnight watchings, and expense of Palladian oil, to the hasty view of an unleisured licenser, perhaps much his younger, perhaps far his inferior in judgment, perhaps one who never knew the labour of book writing; and if he be not repulsed, or slighted, must appear in print like a puny with his guardian, and his censor's hand on the back of his title to be his bail and surety, that he is no idiot or seducer; it cannot be but a dishonour and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of learning.'[3]

Throw open, then, all the doors; let there be light; let every man think, and bring his thoughts to the light. Dread not any divergence, rejoice in this great work; why insult the labourers by the name of schismatics and sectarians?

'Yet these are the men cried out against for schismatics and sectaries, as if, while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men, who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber ere the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world: neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay, rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderate varieties

[1] *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, iii. 172. [2] *Ibid.* 173.
[3] *Areopagitica*, ii. 78.

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and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure.'[1]

Milton triumphs here through sympathy; he breaks forth into magnificent images, he displays in his style the force which he perceives around him and in himself. He lauds the Revolution, and his praises seem like the blast of a trumpet, to come from a brazen throat:—

'Behold now this vast city, a city of refuge, the mansion-house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war has not there more anvils and hammers working, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleagured truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching reformation. . . . What could a man require more from a nation so pliant, and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies?[2] . . . Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.'[3]

It is Milton who speaks, and it is Milton whom he unwittingly describes.

With a sincere writer, doctrines foretell the style. The sentiments and needs which form and govern his beliefs, construct and colour his phrases. The same genius leaves once and again the same impress, in the thought and in the form. The power of logic and enthusiasm which explains the opinions of Milton, explains his genius. The sectarian and the writer are one man, and we shall find the faculties of the sectarian in the talent of the writer.

When an idea is planted in a logical mind, it grows and fructifies there in a multitude of accessory and explanatory ideas which surround it, attached one to the others, and forming a thicket and a forest. The phrases in Milton are immense; page-long periods are necessary to enclose the train of so many linked arguments, and so many accumulated metaphors around the governing thought. In this great production, heart and imagination are shaken; Milton exults while he reasons, and the phrase comes as from a catapult, doubling the force of its flight by its heavy weight. I dare not place before a modern reader the gigantic periods which commence the treatise on the *Reformation in England.* We no longer possess this blast; we only understand little short phrases; we cannot fix our attention on the same point for a

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[1] *Areopagitica*, ii. 92. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 91. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 94.

page at a time. We require manageable ideas; we have disused the big two-handed sword of our fathers, and we only carry a light foil. I doubt, however, if the piercing phraseology of Voltaire be more mortal than the cleaving of this iron mass:—

'If in less noble and almost mechanick arts he is not esteemed to deserve the name of a compleat architect, an excellent painter, or the like, that bears not a generous mind above the peasantly regard of wages and hire, much more must we think him a most imperfect and incompleat divine, who is so far from being a contemner of filthy lucre, that his whole divinity is moulded and bred up in the beggarly and brutish hopes of a fat prebendary, deanery, or bishoprick.'

If Michael Angelo's prophets could speak, it would be in this style; and twenty times while reading it, we may discern the sculptor.

The powerful logic which lengthens the periods sustains the images. If Shakspeare and the masculine poets embrace a picture in the compass of a fleeting expression, break upon their metaphors with new ones, and exhibit successively in the same phrase the same idea in five or six forms, the abrupt motion of their winged imagination authorises or explains these varied colours and these mingling flashes. More connected and more master of himself, Milton develops to the end the threads which these poets break. All his images display themselves in little poems, a sort of solid allegory, all whose interdependent parts concentrate their light on the single idea which they are intended to embellish or demonstrate:—

'In this manner the prelates, . . . coming from a mean and plebeian life on a sudden to be lords of stately palaces, rich furniture, delicious fare, and princely attendance, thought the plain and homespun verity of Christ's gospel unfit any longer to hold their lordships' acquaintance, unless the poor threadbare matron were put into better clothes: her chaste and modest veil, surrounded with celestial beams, they overlaid with wanton tresses, and in a flaring tire bespeckled her with all the gaudy allurements of a whore.'[1]

Politicians reply that this gaudy church supports royalty.

'What greater debasement can there be to royal dignity, whose towering and steadfast height rests upon the unmovable foundations of justice, and heroic virtue, than to chain it in a dependence of subsisting, or ruining, to the painted battlements and gaudy rottenness of prelatry, which want but one puff of the king's to blow them down like a pasteboard house built of court-cards?'[2]

Metaphors thus sustained receive a singular breadth, pomp, and majesty. They are spread forth without clashing together, like the wide folds of a scarlet cloak, bathed in light and fringed with gold.

Do not take these metaphors for an accident. Milton lavishes them, like a priest who in his worship exhibits splendours and wins the eye, to gain the heart. He has been nourished by the reading of Spenser, Drayton, Shakspeare, Beaumont, all the most sparkling poets; and the golden flow of the preceding age, though impoverished all around him

[1] *Of Reformation in England*, ii. first book, 382.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. second book, 397.

and slackened in himself, has become enlarged like a lake through being dammed up in his heart. Like Shakspeare, he imagines at every turn, and even out of turn, and scandalises the classical and French taste.

'. . . As if they could make God earthly and fleshly, because they could not make themselves heavenly and spiritual; they began to draw down all the divine intercourse betwixt God and the soul, yea, the very shape of God himself, into an exterior and bodily form; . . . they hallowed it, they fumed up, they sprinkled it, they bedecked it, not in robes of pure innocency, but of pure linen, with other deformed and fantastic dresses, in palls and mitres, and gewgaws fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe, or the flamins vestry: then was the priest set to con his motions and his postures, his liturgies and his lurries, till the soul by this means of overbodying herself, given up justly to fleshly delights, bated her wing apace downward: and finding the ease she had from her visible and sensuous colleague, the body, in performance of religious duties, her pinions now broken, and flagging, shifted off from herself the labour of high soaring any more, forgot her heavenly flight, and left the dull and droiling carcase to plod on in the old road, and drudging trade of outward conformity.'[1]

If we did not discern here the traces of theological coarseness, we might fancy we were reading an imitator of the *Phædo*, and under the fanatical anger recognise the images of Plato. There is one phrase which for manly beauty and enthusiasm recalls the tone of the *Republic*:—

'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered, unexercised and unbreathed virtue, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.'

But Milton is only Platonic by his richness and exaltation. For the rest, he is a man of the Renaissance, pedantic and harsh; he insults the Pope, who, after the gift of Pepin le Bref, 'never ceased baiting and goring the successors of his best lord Constantine, what by his barking curses and excommunications;'[2] he is mythological in his defence of the press, showing that formerly 'no envious Juno sat cross-legged over the nativity of any man's intellectual offspring.' It matters little: these learned, familiar, grand images, whatever they be, are powerful and natural.[3] Superabundance, like crudity, here only manifests the vigour and lyric dash which Milton's character had predicted.

Even passion follows; exaltation brings it with the images. Bold expressions, exaggeration of style, cause us to hear the vibrating voice of the suffering man, indignant and determined.

'For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred

[1] *Of Reformation in England*, ii. book first, p. 365.

[2] *Of Reformation in England*, ii. second book, 395.

[3] Whatsoever time, or the heedless hand of blind chance, hath drawn down from of old to this present, in her huge drag-net, whether fish or sea-weed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen, those are the fathers. (*Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, ii. 422.)

them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragon's teeth: and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. It is true, no age can restore a life, whereof, perhaps there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse. We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man, preserved and stored up in books; since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom; and if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at the ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself; slays an immortality rather than a life.'[1]

This energy is sublime; the man is equal to the cause, and never did a loftier eloquence match a loftier truth. Terrible expressions overwhelm the book-tyrants, the profaners of thought, the assassins of liberty. 'The council of Trent and the Spanish inquisition, engendering together, brought forth or perfected those catalogues and expurging indexes, that rake through the entrails of many an old good author, with a violation worse than any that could be offered to his tomb.'[2] Similar expressions lash the carnal minds which believe without thinking, and make their servility into a religion. There is a passage which, by its bitter familiarity, recalls Swift, and surpasses him in all loftiness of imagination and genius:—

'A man may be an heretic in the truth, and if he believes things only because his pastor says so, . . . the very truth he holds becomes his heresy. . . . A wealthy man, addicted to his pleasure and to his profits, finds religion to be a traffic so entangled, and of so many piddling accounts, that of all mysteries he cannot skill to keep a stock going upon that trade. . . . What does he therefore, but resolves to give over toiling, and to find himself out some factor, to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs; some divine of note and estimation that must be. To him he adheres, resigns the whole warehouse of his religion, with all the locks and keys, into his custody; and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion. . . . So that a man may say his religion is now no more within himself, but is become a dividual movable, and goes and comes near him, according as that good man frequents the house. He entertains him, gives him gifts, feasts him, lodges him; his religion comes home at night, prays, is liberally supped, and sumptuously laid to sleep; rises, is saluted, and after the malmsey, or some well-spiced bruage, and better breakfasted, . . . his religion walks abroad at eight, and leaves his kind entertainer in the shop trading all day without his religion.'[3]

He condescended to mock for an instant, with what piercing irony you

[1] *Areopagitica*, ii. 55. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 60. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 85.

have seen. But irony, piercing as it may be, seems to him weak.[1] Hear him when he comes to himself, when he returns to open and serious invective, when after the carnal believer he overwhelms the carnal prelate:—

'The table of communion, now become a table of separation, stands like an exalted platform upon the brow of the quire, fortified with bulwark and barricado, to keep off the profane touch of the laics, whilst the obscene and surfeited priest scruples not to paw and mammoc the sacramental bread, as familiarly as his tavern biscuit.'[2]

He triumphs in believing that all these profanations are to be avenged. The horrible doctrine of Calvin has once more fixed men's gaze on the dogma of malediction and everlasting damnation. Hell in hand, Milton menaces; he is drunk with justice and vengeance amid the abysses which he opens, and the flames which he wields:—

'They shall be thrown eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of hell, where, under the despiteful controul, the trample and spurn of all the other damned, that in the anguish of their torture shall have no other ease than to exercice a raving and bestial tyranny over them as their slaves and negroes, they shall remain in that plight for ever the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot, and down-trodded vassals of perdition.'

Fury here mounts to the sublime, and Michael Angelo's Christ is not more inexorable and vengeful.

Let us fill the measure; let us add, as he does, the prospects of heaven to the visions of darkness; the pamphlet becomes a hymn:—

'When I recall to mind at last, after so many dark ages, wherein the huge overshadowing train of error had almost swept all the stars out of the firmament of the church; how the bright and blissful Reformation (by divine power) struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and antichristian tyranny, methinks a sovereign and reviving joy must needs rush into the bosom of him that reads or hears; and the sweet odour of the returning gospel imbathe his soul with the fragrancy of heaven.'[3]

Overloaded with ornaments, infinitely prolonged, these periods are triumphant choruses of angelic alleluias sung by deep voices to the accompaniment of ten thousand harps of gold. In the midst of his syllogisms, Milton prays, sustained by the accent of the prophets, surrounded by memories of the Bible, ravished with the splendours of the Apocalypse, but checked on the brink of hallucination by science and logic, in the summit of the calm clear atmosphere, without rising to the burning tracts where ecstasy dissolves the reason, with a majesty of

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[1] When he is simply comic, he reaches, like Hogarth and Swift, a rude and farcical address. 'A bishop's foot that has all his toes (maugre the gout), and a linen sock over it, is the aptest emblem of the prelat himself; who, being a pluralist, may, under one surplice, hide four benefices, besides that great metropolitan toe.'

[2] *Of Reformation in England*, ii. 378.

[3] *Ibid.* ii. 366.

eloquence and a solemn grandeur never surpassed, whose perfection proves that he has entered his domain, and gives promise of the poet beyond the prose-writer:—

'Thou, therefore, that sittest in light and glory unapproachable, parent of angels and men! next, thee I implore, omnipotent King, Redeemer of that lost remnant whose nature thou didst assume, ineffable and everlasting Love! and thou, the third subsistence of divine infinitude, illumining Spirit, the joy and solace of created things! one Tripersonal Godhead! look upon this thy poor and almost spent and expiring church. . . . O let them not bring about their damned designs, . . . to reinvolve us in that pitchy cloud of infernal darkness, where we shall never more see the sun of thy truth again, never hope for the cheerful dawn, never more hear the bird of morning sing.'[1]

'O Thou the ever-begotten Light and perfect Image of the Father, . . . Who is there that cannot trace thee now in thy beamy walk through the midst of thy sanctuary, amidst those golden candlesticks, which have long suffered a dimness amongst us through the violence of those that had seized them, and were more taken with the mention of their gold than of their starry light? . . . Come therefore, O thou that hast the seven stars in thy right hand, appoint thy chosen priests according to their orders and courses of old, to minister before thee, and duly to press and pour out the consecrated oil into thy holy and ever-burning lamps. Thou hast sent out the spirit of prayer upon thy servants over all the land to this effect, and stirred up their vows as the sound of many waters about thy throne. . . . O perfect and accomplish thy glorious acts! . . . Come forth out of thy royal chambers, O Prince of all the kings of the earth! put on the visible robes of thy imperial majesty, take up that unlimited sceptre which thy Almighty Father hath bequeathed thee; for now the voice of thy bride calls thee, and all creatures sigh to be renewed.'[2]

This song of supplications and cheerfulness is an outpouring of splendours; and if you search all literature, you will hardly find poets equal to this writer of prose.

Is he truly a prose-writer? Entangled dialectics, a heavy and awkward mind, fanatical and ferocious provincialism, an epic grandeur of sustained and superabundant images, the blast and the temerities of implacable and all-powerful passion, the sublimity of religious and lyric exaltation: we do not recognise in these features a man born to explain, persuade, and prove. The scholasticism and grossness of the time have blunted or rusted his logic. Imagination and enthusiasm carried him away and enchained him in metaphor. Thus dazzled or marred, he could not produce a perfect work; he did but write useful tracts, called forth by practical interest and actual hate, and fine isolated morsels, inspired by collision with a grand idea, and by the momentary flight of genius. Yet, in all these abandoned fragments, the man shows in his entirety. The systematic and lyric spirit is manifested in the pamphlet as well as in the poem; the faculty of embracing general effects, and of being shaken by them, remains on an equality in Milton's

[1] *Of Reformation in England*, ii. 417. [2] *Animadversions*, etc., iii. 71.

two careers, and you will see in the *Paradise* and *Comus* what you have met with in the *Treatise on the Reformation*, and in the *Animadversions on the Remonstrant.*

VI.

'Milton has acknowledged to me,' writes Dryden, 'that Spenser was his original.' In fact, by the purity and elevation of their morals, by the fulness and connection of their style, by the noble chivalric sentiments, and their fine classical arrangement, they are brothers. But he had yet other masters—Beaumont, Fletcher, Burton, Drummond, Ben Jonson, Shakspeare, the whole splendid English Renaissance, and behind it the Italian poesy, Latin antiquity, the fine Greek literature, and all the sources whence the English Renaissance sprang. He continued the great current, but in a manner of his own. He took their mythology, their allegories, sometimes their conceits,[1] and found the trick of their rich colouring, their magnificent sentiment of living nature, their inexhaustible admiration of forms and colours. But, at the same time, he transformed their diction, and employed poetry in a new service. He wrote, not by impulse, and at the mere contact with things, but like a man of letters, a classic, in a scholarlike manner, with the assistance of books, seeing objects as much through previous writings as in themselves, adding to his images the images of others, borrowing and re-casting their inventions, as an artist who unites and multiplies the bosses and driven gold, already entwined on a diadem by twenty workmen. He made thus for himself a composite and brilliant style, less natural than that of his precursors, less fit for effusions, less akin to the lively first glow of sensation, but more solid, more regular, more capable of concentrating in one large patch of light all their sparklings and splendours. He brings together, like Æschylus, words of 'six cubits,' plumed and decked in purple, and made them flow like a royal train before his idea, to exalt and announce it. He introduces to us

> 'The breathing roses of the wood,
> Fair silver-buskin'd nymphs;'[2]

and tells how

> 'The gray-hooded Even,
> Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed,
> Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' wain;'[3]

and speaks of

> 'All the sea-girt isles,
> That, like to rich and various gems, inlay
> The unadorned bosom of the deep;'[4]

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[1] See the *Hymn on the Nativity;* amongst others, the first few strophes. See also *Lycidas.*

[2] *Arcades, v.* 32. [3] *Comus, v.* 188–190. [4] *Ibid. v.* 21–23.

and

'That undisturbed song of pure concent,
Aye sung before the sapphire-colour'd throne,
To Him that sits thereon,
With saintly shout, and solemn jubilee;
Where the bright Seraphim, in burning row,
Their loud-uplifted angel-trumpets blow.'[1]

He gathered into full nosegays the flowers scattered through the other poets:

'Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart-star sparely looks;
Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freak'd with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureat herse where Lycid lies.'[2]

When still quite young, on his quitting Cambridge, he inclined to the magnificent and grand; he wanted a great rolling verse, an ample and sounding strophe, vast periods of fourteen and four-and-twenty lines. He did not face objects on a level, as a mortal, but from on high, like those archangels of Goethe,[3] who embrace at a glance the whole ocean lashing its coasts, and the earth rolling on, wrapt in the harmony of the fraternal stars. It was not life that he felt, like the masters of the Renaissance, but greatness, like Æschylus, and the Hebrew seers,[4] manly and lyric spirits like his own, who, nourished like him in religious emotions and continuous enthusiasm, like him displayed sacerdotal pomp and majesty. To express such a sentiment, images, and poetry addressed only to the eyes, were not enough; sounds also were requisite, and that more introspective poetry which, purged from corporeal shows, could reach the soul: Milton was a musician; his hymns rolled with the slowness of a measured song and the gravity of a declamation; and he seems himself to be describing his art in these incomparable verses, which are evolved like the solemn harmony of a motett:

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[1] *Ode at a Solemn Music, v.* 6–11. [2] *Lycidas, v.* 136–151.

[3] *Faust, Prolog im Himmel.*

[4] See the prophecy against Archbishop Laud in *Lycidas*, v. 130:

'But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.'

'But else, in deep of night, when drowsiness
Hath lock'd up mortal sense, then listen I
To the celestial sirens' harmony,
That sit upon the nine infolded spheres,
And sing to those that hold the vital shears,
And turn the adamantine spindle round,
On which the fate of gods and men is wound.
Such sweet compulsion doth in musick lie,
To lull the daughters of Necessity,
And keep unsteady Nature to her law,
And the low world in measured motion draw
After the heavenly tune, which none can hear
Of human mould, with gross unpurged ear.'[1]

With his style, his subjects differed; he compacted and ennobled the poet's domain as well as his language, and consecrated his thoughts as well as his words. He who knows the true nature of poetry soon finds, as Milton said a little later, what despicable creatures 'libidinous and ignorant poetasters' are, and to what religious, glorious, splendid use poetry can be put in things divine and human. 'These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ.'[2]

In fact, from the first, at St. Paul's School and at Cambridge, he had written *Paraphrases of the Psalms*, then composed odes on the *Nativity*, *Circumcision*, and *Passion*. Presently appeared sad poems on the *Death of a Fair Infant*, *An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester;* then grave and noble verses *On Time*, *at a Solemn Musick*, a sonnet *On his being arrived to the Age of Twenty-three*, 'a late spring which shew'th no bud or blossom.' At last we have him in the country with his father, and the hopes, dreams, first enchantments of youth, rise from his heart like the morning breath of a summer's day. But what a distance between these calm and bright contemplations and the warm youth, the voluptuous *Adonis* of Shakspeare! He walked, used his eyes, listened; there his joys ended; they are but the poetic joys of the soul:

'To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing, startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise; . . .

[1] *Arcades*, *v.* 61–73.
[2] iii. *The Reason of Church Government*, book ii. Introduction, 479.

While the plowman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrow'd land,
And the milk-maid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his sithe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.'[1]

To see the village dances and gaiety; to look upon the 'high triumphs' and the 'busy hum of men' in the 'tower'd cities;' above all, to abandon himself to melody, to the divine roll of sweet verse, and the charming dreams which they spread before us in a golden light;—this is all; and presently, as if he had gone too far, to counterbalance this eulogy of sensuous joys, he summons Melancholy:

'Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, stedfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain,
Flowing with majestick train,
And sable stole of Cyprus lawn
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.
Come; but keep thy wonted state,
With even step, and musing gait;
And looks commercing with the skies
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes.'[2]

With her he wanders amidst grave thoughts and grave sights, which recall a man to his condition, and prepare him for his duties, now amongst the high colonnades of primeval trees, whose 'high-embowed roof' retains the silence and the twilight under their shade; now in

'The studious cloysters pale, . . .
With antick pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light;'[3]

now again in the retirement of the study, where the cricket chirps, where the lamp of labour shines, where the mind, alone with the noble minds of the past, may

'Unsphere
The spirit of Plato, to unfold
What worlds or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind, that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.'[4]

He was filled with this lofty philosophy. Whatever the language he used, English, Italian, or Latin, whatever the kind of verse, sonnets, hymns, stanzas, tragedy or epic, he always returned to it. He praised above all chaste love, piety, generosity, heroic force. It was not from scruple, but it was innate in him; his chief need and faculty led him to noble conceptions. He took a delight in admiring, as Shakspeare in creat-

[1] *L'Allegro*, v. 41–68.
[2] *Il Penseroso*, v. 31–40.
[3] *Ibid.* v. 156–160.
[4] *Ibid.* v. 88–92.

ing, as Swift in destroying, as Byron in combating, as Spenser in dreaming. Even on ornamental poems, which were only employed to exhibit costumes and introduce fairy-tales, in Masques, like those of Ben Jonson, he impressed his own character. They were amusements for the castle; he made out of them lectures on magnanimity and constancy: one of them, *Comus*, well worked out, with a complete originality and extraordinary elevation of style, is perhaps his masterpiece, and is simply the eulogy of virtue.

Here we are in the heavens at the first dash. A spirit, descended in the midst of wild woods, repeats this ode:

'Before the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aerial spirits live insphered
In regions mild of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call earth; and, with low-thoughted care
Confined, and pester'd in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants,
Amongst the enthroned Gods on sainted seats.'[1]

Such characters cannot speak; they sing. The drama is an antique opera, composed like the *Prometheus* of solemn hymns. The spectator is transported beyond the real world. He does not listen to men, but to sentiments. He assists at a concert, as in Shakspeare; the *Comus* continues the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, as a choir of deep men's voices continues the glowing and sad symphony of the instruments:

'Through the perplex'd paths of this drear wood,
The nodding horrour of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger,'[2]

strays a noble lady, separated from her two brothers, troubled by the savage cries and turbulent joy which she hears from afar. There the son of Circe the enchantress, sensual Comus, dances and shakes his torches amid the clamour of men transformed into brutes; it is the hour when

'The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move;
And, on the tawny sands and shelves
Trip the pert faeries and the dapper elves.'[3]

The lady is terrified, and sinks on her knees; and in the misty forms which float above in the pale light, perceives the mysterious and heavenly guardians who watch over her life and honour:

'O, welcome, pure-eyed Faith; white-handed Hope,
Thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings;

[1] *Comus*, v. 1–11. [2] *Ibid.* v. 37–39. [3] *Ibid.* v. 115–118.

And thou, unblemish'd form of Chastity!
I see ye visibly, and now believe
That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
Would send a glistering guardian, if need were,
To keep my life and honour unassail'd.
Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
I did not err; there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.'[1]

She calls her brothers:

'At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
Rose like a steam of rich distill'd perfumes,
And stole upon the air,[2]

across the 'violet-embroider'd vale,' to the dissolute god whom she enchants. He comes disguised as a 'gentle shepherd,' and says:

'Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
Breathe such divine, enchanting ravishment?
Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testify his hidden residence.
How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night,
At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of darkness, till it smiled! I have oft heard
My mother Circe with the syrens three,
Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,
Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs;
Who, as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,
And lap it in Elysium: Scylla wept,
And chid her barking waves into attention. . . .
But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never heard till now.'[3]

They were heavenly songs which Comus heard; Milton describes, and at the same time imitates them; he makes us understand the saying of his master Plato, that virtuous melodies teach virtue.

Circe's son has by deceit carried off the noble lady, and seats her, with 'nerves all chained up,' in a sumptuous palace before a table spread with all dainties. She accuses him, resists, insults him, and the style assumes an air of heroical indignation, to scorn the offer of the tempter.

'When lust,
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,

[1] *Comus*, v. 213–225. [2] *Ibid.* v. 555–557. [3] *Ibid.* v. 244–264.

Lets in defilement to the inward parts;
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being.
Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp,
Oft seen in charnel vaults and sepulchres
Lingering, and sitting by a new-made grave,
As loth to leave the body that it loved.'[1]

Confounded, Comus pauses; and at the same instant the brothers, led by the attendant Spirit, cast themselves upon him with drawn swords. He flees, carrying off his magic wand. To deliver the enchanted lady, they summon Sabrina, the benevolent naiad, who sits

'Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy (her) amber-dropping hair.'[2]

The 'goddess of the silver lake' rises lightly from her 'coral-paven bed,' and her chariot 'of turkis blue and emerald-green,' sets her down

'By the rushy-fringed bank,
Where grows the willow, and the osier dank.'[3]

Sprinkled by this chaste and cool hand, the lady leaves the 'venom'd seat' which held her spell-bound; the brothers, with their sister, reign peacefully in their father's palace; and the Spirit, who has conducted all, pronounces this ode, in which the poetry leads up to philosophy: the voluptuous light of an Oriental legend bathes the Elysium of the good, and all the splendours of nature assemble to add a seductiveness to virtue.

'To the ocean now I fly,
And those happy climes that lie
Where day never shuts his eye
Up in the broad fields of the sky:
There I suck the liquid air
All amidst the gardens fair
Of Hesperus, and his daughters three
That sing about the golden tree:
Along the crisped shades and bowers
Revels the spruce and jocund Spring;
The Graces, and the rosy-bosom'd Hours,
Thither all their bounties bring;
There eternal Summer dwells,
And west winds, with musky wing,
About the cedar'n alleys fling
Nard and cassia's balmy smells.
Iris there with humid bow
Waters the odorous banks, that blow

[1] *Comus*, v. 463–473. It is the elder brother who utters these lines when speaking of his sister.—TR.

[2] *Ibid.* v. 861–863.

[3] *Ibid.* v. 890.

Flowers of more mingled hew
Than her purpled scarf can shew;
And drenches with Elysian dew
(List, mortals, if your ears be true)
Beds of hyacinth and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound
In slumber soft, and on the ground
Sadly sits the Assyrian queen:
But far above in spangled sheen
Celestial Cupid, her famed son, advanced,
Holds his dear Psyche sweet entranced,
After her wandering labours long,
Till free consent the gods among
Make her his eternal bride,
And from her fair unspotted side
Two blissful twins are to be born,
Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn.
But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run,
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bow'd welkin slow doth bend;
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.
Mortals, that would follow me,
Love Virtue; she alone is free:
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or, if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.'[1]

Should I have remarked on the awkwardnesses, strangenesses, overloaded expressions, the inheritance of the Renaissance, a philosophical question, the work of a reasoner and a Platonist? I have not perceived these faults. All was effaced before the spectacle of the bright Renaissance, transformed by austere philosophy, and of sublimity adored upon an altar of flowers.

That, I think, was his last profane poem. Already, in the one which followed, *Lycidas*, celebrating in the style of Virgil the death of a beloved friend,[2] he suffers the Puritan wrath and prejudices to shine through, inveighs against the bad teaching and tyranny of the bishops, and speaks of 'that two-handed engine at the door, ready to smite once, and smite no more.' On his return from Italy, controversy and action carried him away; prose begins, poetry is arrested. From time to time a patriotic or religious sonnet comes to break the long silence; now to praise the chief Puritans, Cromwell, Vane, Fairfax; now to celebrate the death of a pious lady, or the life of 'a virtuous young lady;' once to pray God 'to avenge his slaughter'd saints,' the

[1] *Comus*, v. 976–1023.

[2] Edward King, 1637.

unhappy Protestants of Piedmont, 'whose bones lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;' again, on his second wife, dead a year after their marriage, his well beloved 'saint'—'brought to me, like Alcestis, from the grave, . . . came, vested all in white, pure as her mind;' loyal friendships, sorrows bowed to or subdued, aspirations generous or stoical, which reverses did but purify. Old age came; cut off from power, action, even hope, he returned to the great dreams of his youth. As of old, he went out of this low world in search of the sublime; for the actual is petty, and the familiar seems dull. He selects his new characters on the verge of sacred antiquity, as he selected his old ones on the verge of fabulous antiquity, because distance adds to their stature; and habit, ceasing to measure, ceases also to depreciate them. Just now we had creatures of fancy: Joy, daughter of Zephyr and Aurora; Melancholy, daughter of Vesta and Saturn; Comus, son of Circe, ivy-crowned, god of echoing woods and turbulent excess. Now, Samson, despiser of giants, elect of the strong god, exterminator of idolaters, Satan and his peers, Christ and his angels, come and rise before our eyes like superhuman statues; and their far removal, rendering vain our curious hands, will preserve our admiration and their majesty. Let us rise further and higher, to the origin of things, amongst eternal beings, to the commencement of thought and life, to the battles of God, in this unknown world where sentiments and existences, raised above the ken of man, elude his judgment and criticism to command his veneration and awe; let the sustained song of solemn verse unfold the actions of these shadowy figures: we shall experience the same emotion as in a cathedral, while the organ prolongs its reverberations among the arches, and through the dim light of the tapers the incense clouds envelope the colossal bulk of the columns.

But if the heart remains unchanged, the genius is transformed. Manliness has supplanted youth. The richness has decreased, the severity has increased. Seventeen years of fighting and misfortune have steeped his soul in religious ideas. Mythology has yielded to theology; the habit of discussion has ended by subduing the lyric flight; accumulated learning by choking the original genius. The poet no more sings sublime verse, he relates or harangues in grave verse. He no longer invents a personal style; he imitates antique tragedy or epic. In *Samson* he finds a cold and lofty tragedy, in *Paradise Regained* a cold and noble epic; he composes an imperfect and sublime poem in *Paradise Lost*.

Would he could have written it as he tried, in the shape of a drama, or better, as the *Prometheus* of Æschylus, as a lyric opera! Such and such a subject demands such and such a style; if you resist, you destroy your work, too happy if, in the deformed medley, chance produces and preserves a few beautiful fragments. To bring the supernatural upon the scene, you must not continue in your original mood; if you do, you have the air of not believing in it. Vision reveals it,

and the style of vision must express it. When Spenser writes, he dreams. We listen to the happy concerts of his aerial music, and the varying train of his fanciful apparitions unfolds like a vapour before our accommodating and dazzled gaze. When Dante writes, he is rapt; and his cries of anguish, his transports, the incoherent succession of his infernal or mystical phantoms, carry us with him into the invisible world which he describes. Ecstasy alone renders visible and credible the objects of ecstasy. If you tell us of the exploits of the Deity as you tell us of Cromwell's, in a grave and lofty tone, we do not see God; and as He constitutes the whole of your poem, we do not see anything. We conclude that you have accepted a tradition, that you adorn it with the fictions of your mind, that you are a preacher, not a prophet, a decorator, not a poet. We find that you sing of God as the vulgar pray to him, after a formula learnt, not from spontaneous emotion. Change your style, or, if you can, change your emotion. Try and discover in yourself the ancient fervour of psalmists and apostles, to recreate the divine legend, to feel over again the sublime motions by which the inspired and disturbed mind perceives God; then the grand lyric verse will roll on, laden with splendours. Thus roused, we shall not have to examine whether it be Adam or Messiah who speaks; we shall not have to demand that they shall be real, and constructed by the hand of a psychologist; we shall not trouble ourselves with their puerile or unlooked for actions; we shall be carried away, we shall share in your creative madness; we shall be drawn onward by the flow of bold images, or raised by the combination of gigantic metaphors; we shall be moved like Æschylus, when his thunder-stricken Prometheus hears the universal concert of streams, seas, forests, and created beings, lament with him,[1] as David before Jehovah, for whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, who 'carriest them away as with a flood; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.'[2]

But the age of metaphysical inspiration, long diverted, had not yet reappeared. Far in the past Dante was fading away; far in the future Goethe lay unrevealed. People saw not yet the pantheistic *Faust*, and the vague nature which absorbs all transformed existence in her deep bosom; they saw no longer the mystic paradise and immortal Love, whose ideal light envelopes souls redeemed. Protestantism had neither altered nor renewed divine nature; the guardian of an accepted creed and ancient tradition, it had only transformed ecclesiastical discipline

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[1] ὦ δῖος αἰθὴρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί
ποταμῶν τε πηγαί, ποντίων τε κυμάτων
ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, παμμῆτόρ'τε γῆ,
καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ,
ὄψεσθέ μ', οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός.
Prometheus Vinctus, ed. Herman, p. 487, line 88.—TR.

[2] Ps. xc. 5.

and the doctrine of grace. It had only called the Christian to personal salvation and secular liberty. It had only remodelled man, it had not re-created the Deity. It could not produce a divine epic, but a human epic. It could not sing the battles and works of God, but the temptations and salvation of the soul. At the time of Christ came the poems of cosmogony; at the time of Milton, the confessions of psychology. At the time of Christ each imagination produced a hierarchy of supernatural beings, and a history of the world; at the time of Milton, every heart recorded the series of its upliftings, and the history of grace. Learning and reflection led Milton to a metaphysical poem which was not the natural offspring of the age, whilst inspiration and ignorance revealed to Bunyan the psychological narrative which suited the age, and the great man's genius was feebler than the tinker's simplicity.

And why? Milton's poem, suppressing lyrical illusion, admitted critical inquiry. Free from enthusiasm we judge his characters; we demand that they shall be living, real, complete, harmonious, like those of a novel or a drama. No longer hearing odes, we would see objects and souls: we ask that Adam and Eve should act in conformity with their primitive nature; that God, Satan, and Messiah should act and feel in conformity with their superhuman nature. Shakspeare would barely have discharged the task; Milton, the logician and reasoner, failed in it. He gives us correct solemn discourse, and gives us nothing more; his characters are speeches, and in their sentiments we find only heaps of puerilities and contradictions.

Adam and Eve, the first pair! I approach, and it seems as though I discovered the Adam and Eve of Raphael Sanzio, imitated by Milton, so his biographers tell us, glorious, strong, voluptuous children, naked in the light of heaven, motionless and absorbed before grand landscapes, with bright vacant eyes, with no more thought than the bull or the horse on the grass beside them. I listen, and I hear an English household, two reasoners of the period—Colonel Hutchinson and his wife. Heavens! dress them at once. Folk so cultivated should have invented before all a pair of trousers and modesty. What dialogues! Dissertations capped by politeness, mutual sermons concluded by bows. What bows! Philosophical compliments and moral smiles. I yielded, says Eve,

> 'And from that time see
> How beauty is excell'd by manly grace
> And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.'[1]

Dear learned poet, you would have been better satisfied if one of your three wives had, as an apt pupil, uttered to you by way of conclusion the above solid theoretical maxim. They did utter it to you; this is a scene from your own household:

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book iv. *v.* 489.

'So spake our general mother; and, with eyes
Of conjugal attraction unreproved
And meek surrender, half-embracing lean'd
On our first father; half her swelling breast
Naked met his, under the flowing gold
Of her loose tresses hid; he, in delight
Both of her beauty and submissive charms,
Smiled with superiour love, . . . and press'd her matron lip
With kisses pure.'[1]

This Adam entered Paradise *via* England. There he learned respectability, and there he studied moral speechifying. Let us hear this man before he has tasted of the tree of knowledge. A bachelor of arts, in his introductory address, could not utter more fitly and nobly a greater number of pithless sentences:

'Fair consort, the hour
Of night, and all things now retired to rest,
Mind us of like repose; since God hath set
Labour and rest, as day and night, to men
Successive; and the timely dew of sleep,
Now falling with soft slumbrous weight, inclines
Our eyelids; other creatures all day long
Rove idle, unemploy'd, and less need rest:
Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his dignity,
And the regard of Heaven on all his ways;
While other animals unactive range,
And of their doings God takes no account.'[2]

A very useful and excellent Puritanical exhortation! That is English virtue and morality; and at evening, in every family, it can be read to the children like the Bible. Adam is your true paterfamilias, with a vote, an M.P., an old Oxford man, consulted at need by his wife, dealing out to her with prudent measure the scientific explanations which she requires. This night, for instance, the poor lady had a bad dream, and Adam, in his trencher-cap, administers this learned psychological draught:[3]

'Know, that in the soul
Are many lesser faculties that serve
Reason as chief; among these Fancy next
Her office holds; of all external things,
Which the five watchful senses represent,
She forms imaginations, aery shapes
Which Reason, joining or disjoining, frames
All what we affirm or what deny, and call
Our knowledge or opinion. . . . .

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[1] *Paradise Lost*, book iv. *v.* 492–502. [2] *Ibid. v.* 610–622.

[3] It would be impossible that a man so learned, so argumentative, should spend his whole time in gardening and making up nosegays.

Oft in her absence mimic fancy wakes
To imitate her; but, misjoining shapes,
Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams;
Ill matching words and deeds long past or late.'[1]

Here was something to send Eve off to sleep again. Her husband, noting the effect, adds like an accredited casuist:

'Yet be not sad:
Evil into the mind of God or man
May come and go, so unapproved; and leave
No spot or blame behind.'[2]

We recognise the Protestant husband, his wife's confessor. Next day comes an angel on a visit. Adam tells Eve:

'Go with speed,
And, what thy stores contain, bring forth, and pour
Abundance, fit to honour and receive
Our heavenly stranger . . . he
Beholding shall confess, that here on earth
God hath dispensed his bounties as in heaven.'[3]

Mark this becoming zeal of a hospitable lady. She goes in haste:

'What choice to choose for delicacy best;
What order, so contrived as not to mix
Tastes, not well join'd, inelegant; but bring
Taste after taste upheld with kindliest change.'[4]

She makes sweet wine, perry, creams; scatters flowers and leaves under the table. Good housewife! How many votes will she gain among the country squires, when Adam stands for Parliament! Adam belongs to the Opposition, is a Whig, a Puritan. He

'Walks forth; without more train
Accompanied than with his own complete
Perfections: in himself was all his state;
More solemn than the tedious pomp that waits
On princes, when their rich retinue long
Of horses led, and grooms besmeared with gold,
Dazzles the crowd.'[5]

The epic is changed into a political poem, and we have heard an epigram against power. The preliminary ceremonies are somewhat long; fortunately, the dishes being uncooked, 'no fear lest dinner cool.' The angel, though ethereal, eats like a Lincolnshire farmer:

'Nor seemingly
The angel, nor in mist, the common gloss
Of theologians; but with keen dispatch
Of real hunger, and concoctive heat
To transubstantiate: what redounds, transpires
Through spirits with ease.'[6]

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[1] *Paradise Lost*, book v. *v.* 100–113. [2] *Ibid. v.* 116–119. [3] *Ibid. v.* 313–330.
[4] *Ibid. v.* 333–336. [5] *Ibid. v.* 351–357. [6] *Ibid. v.* 434–439.

At table Eve listens to the angel's stories, then discreetly rises at dessert, when they are getting into politics. English ladies may learn by her example to perceive from their lords' faces when they are 'entering on studious thoughts abstruse.' The sex does not mount so high. A wise lady prefers her husband's talk to that of strangers. 'Her husband the relater she preferred.' Now Adam hears a little treatise on astronomy. He concludes, like a practical Englishman:

> 'But to know
> That which before us lies in daily life,
> Is the prime wisdom: what is more, is fume,
> Or emptiness, or fond impertinence;
> And renders us, in things that most concern,
> Unpractised, unprepared, and still to seek.'[1]

The angel gone, Eve, dissatisfied with her garden, wishes to have it improved, and proposes to her husband to work in it, she on one side, he on the other. He says, with an approving smile:

> 'Nothing lovelier can be found
> In woman, than to study household good,
> And good works in her husband to promote.'[2]

But he fears for her, and would keep her at his side. She rebels with a little prick of proud vanity, like a young lady who mayn't go out by herself. She has her way, goes, and eats the apple. Here interminable speeches come down on the reader, as numerous and cold as winter showers. The speeches of Parliament after Pride's Purge were hardly heavier. The serpent seduces Eve by a collection of arguments worthy of the punctilious Chillingworth, and then the syllogistic mist enters her poor brain:

> 'His forbidding
> Commends thee more, while it infers the good
> By thee communicated, and our want:
> For good unknown sure is not had; or, had
> And yet unknown, is as not had at all. . . .
> Such prohibitions bind not.'[3]

Eve is from Oxford too, has also learned law in the inns about the Temple, and wears, like her husband, the doctor's trencher-cap.

The flow of dissertations never pauses; from Paradise it gets into heaven: neither heaven nor earth, nor hell itself, would swamp it.

Of all characters which man could bring upon the scene, God is the finest. The cosmogonies of peoples are sublime poems, and the artists' genius does not attain perfection until it is sustained by such conceptions. The Hindoo sacred poems, the Biblical prophecies, the Edda, the Olympus of Hesiod and Homer, the visions of Dante, are glowing flowers from which a whole civilisation blooms, and every emotion

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book viii. *v.* 192–197.
[2] *Ibid.* book ix. *v.* 232. [3] *Ibid. v.* 753–760.

vanishes before the lightning thought by which they have leapt from the bottom of our heart. Nothing then can be more depressing than the degradation of these noble ideas, settling into the regularity of formulas, and under the discipline of a popular worship. What is smaller than a god sunk to the level of a king and a man? what more repulsive than the Hebrew Jehovah, defined by theological pedantry, governed in his actions by the last manual of doctrine, petrified by literal interpretation?

Milton's Jehovah is a grave king, who maintains a suitable state, something like Charles I. When we meet him for the first time, in Book III., he is holding council, and setting forth a matter of business. From the style we see his grand furred cloak, his pointed Vandyke beard, his velvet-covered throne and golden dais. The business concerns a law which does not act well, and respecting which he desires to justify his rule. Adam is about to eat the apple: why have exposed Adam to the temptation? The royal orator discusses the question, and shows the reason:

'I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all the ethereal powers
And spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd. . . .
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant faith, or love?
Where only, what they needs must do, appear'd,
Not what they would: what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid?
When will and reason, (reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,
Made passive both, had served necessity,
Not me. They therefore, as to right belong'd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate;
As if predestination over-ruled
Their will, disposed by absolute decree
Or high foreknowledge: they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, authours to themselves in all,
Both what they judge and what they choose.'[1]

The modern reader is not so patient as the Thrones, Seraphim, and Dominations; this is why I stop half-way in the royal speech. We perceive that Milton's Jehovah is connected with the theologian James I., versed in the arguments of Arminians and Gomarists, very clever

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book iii. *v.* 98–123.

at the *distinguo*, and, before all, incomparably tedious. To get them to listen to such tirades he must pay his councillors of state very well. His son answers him respectfully in the same style. Goethe's God, half abstraction, half legend, source of calm oracles, a vision just beheld after a pyramid of ecstatic strophes,[1] greatly excels this Miltonic God, a business man, a schoolmaster, a man for show! I honour him too much in giving him these titles. He deserves a worse name, when he sends Raphael to warn Adam that Satan intends him some mischief:

> 'This let him know,
> Lest, wilfully transgressing, he pretend
> Surprisal, unadmonish'd, unforewarn'd.'[2]

This Miltonic Deity is only a schoolmaster, who, foreseeing the fault of his pupil, tells him beforehand the grammar rule, so as to have the pleasure of scolding him without discussion. Moreover, like a good politician, he had a second motive, just as with his angels, 'For state, as sovran king; and to inure our prompt obedience.' The word is out; we see what Milton's heaven is: a Whitehall filled with bedizened footmen. The angels are the chapel singers, whose business is to sing hymns about the king and before the king, relieving each other to sing 'melodious hymns about the sovran throne.' What a life for this poor king! and what a cruel condition, to hear eternally his own praises![3] To amuse himself, Milton's Deity decides to crown his son king—partner-king, if you prefer it. Read the passage, and say if it be not a ceremony of his time that the poet describes:

> 'Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,
> Standards and gonfalons 'twixt van and rear
> Stream in the air, and for distinction serve
> Of hierarchies, of orders, and degrees;
> Or in their glittering tissues bear imblazed
> Holy memorials, acts of zeal and love
> Recorded eminent;'[4]

doubtless the capture of a Dutch vessel, the defeat of the Spaniards in the Downs. The king brings forward his son, 'anoints' him, declares him 'his great vicegerent:'

> 'To him shall bow
> All knees in heaven. . . . Him who disobeys,
> Me disobeys;'[5]

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[1] End of the continuation of *Faust*. *Prologue in Heaven.*

[2] *Paradise Lost*, book v. *v.* 243.

[3] We are reminded of the history of Ira in Voltaire, condemned to hear without intermission or end the praises of four chamberlains, and the following hymn:

> 'Que son mérite est extrême!
> Que de grâces, que de grandeur.
> Ah! combien monseigneur
> Doit être content de lui-meme!'

[4] *Paradise Lost*, book v. *v.* 588–594.

[5] *Ibid. v.* 607–612.

and such were, in fact, expelled from heaven the same day. 'All seem'd well pleased; all seem'd, but were not all.' Yet

> 'That day, as other solemn days, they spent
> In song and dance about the sacred hill. . . .
> Forthwith from dance to sweet repast they turn
> Desirous.'[1]

Milton describes the tables, the dishes, the wine, the vessels. It is a popular festival; I miss the fireworks, the bell-ringing, as in London, and I can fancy that all would drink to the health of the new king. Then Satan revolts; he takes his troops to the other end of the country, like Lambert or Monk, toward 'the quarters of the north,' Scotland perhaps, passing through well-governed districts, 'empires,' with their sheriffs and lord-lieutenants. Heaven is divided like a good map. Satan holds forth before his officers against royalty, opposes in a word-combat the good royalist Abdiel, who refutes his 'blasphemous, false, and proud' arguments and quits him to rejoin his prince at Oxford. Well armed, the rebel marches with his pikemen and artillery to attack the fortress.[2] The two parties cut each other with the sword, mow each other down with cannon-balls, knock each other down with political arguments. These sorry angels have a mind as well disciplined as the Parliamentarians; they have passed their youth in a class of logic and in a drill school. Satan holds forth like a preacher:

> 'What heaven's Lord had powerfulest to send
> Against us from about his throne, and judged
> Sufficient to subdue us to his will,
> But proves not so: then fallible, it seems,
> Of future we may deem him, though till now
> Omniscient thought.'[3]

He also talks like a drill-sergeant. 'Vanguard, to right and left the front unfold.' He makes quips as clumsy as those of Harrison, the former butcher turned officer. What a heaven! It is enough to disgust one with Paradise; one would rather enter Charles I.'s troop of lackeys, or Cromwell's Ironsides. We have orders of the day, a hierarchy, exact submission, extra-duties, disputes, regulated ceremonials, prostrations, etiquette, furbished arms, arsenals, depots of chariots and ammunition. Was it worth while leaving earth to find in heaven carriage-works,

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[1] *Paradise Lost*, book v. *v.* 617–631.

[2] The Miltonic Deity is so much on the level of a king and man, that he uses (with irony certainly) words like these: 'Lest unwary we love this place, our sanctuary, our hill.'

His son, about to flesh his maiden sword, replies: 'If I be found the worst in heaven,' etc.—Book vi.

[3] *Paradise Lost*, book vi. *v.* 425–430.

buildings, artillery, a manual of tactics, the art of salutations, and the Almanac de Gotha? Are these the things which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart to conceive?' What a gap between this monarchical frippery[1] and the visions of Dante, the souls floating like stars amid the harmonies, the mingled splendours, the mystic roses radiating and vanishing in the azure, the impalpable world in which all the laws of earthly life are dissolved, the unfathomable abyss traversed by fleeting visions, like golden bees gliding in the rays of the deep central sun! Is it not a sign of extinguished imagination, of the inroad of prose, of the birth of the practical genius, replacing metaphysics by morality? What a fall! To measure it, read a true Christian poem, the Apocalypse. I copy half-a-dozen verses; think what it has become in the hands of the imitator:

'And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

'And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

'His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

'And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

'And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

'And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.'[2]

When Milton was arranging his celestial show, he did not fall as dead.

But if the innate and inveterate habits of logical argument, joined with the literal theology of the time, prevented him from attaining to lyrical illusion or from creating living souls, the splendour of his grand imagination, joined with the Puritan passions, furnished him with an heroic character, several sublime hymns, and scenery which no one has surpassed. The finest thing in connection with this Paradise is hell; and in this history of God, the chief part is taken by the devil. The ridiculous devil of the middle-age, a horned enchanter, a dirty jester, a petty and mischievous ape, band-leader to a rabble of old women, has become a giant and a hero. Like a conquered and vanished Cromwell, he remains admired and obeyed by those whom he has drawn into the abyss. If he continues master, it is because he deserves it; firmer, more enterprising, more scheming than the rest, it is always

[1] When Raphael comes on earth, the angels who are 'under watch,' 'in honour rise.' The disagreeable and characteristic feature of this heaven is, that the universal motive is obedience, while in Dante's it is love. 'Lowly reverent they bow. . . . Our happy state we hold, like yours, while our obedience holds.'

[2] Rev. i. 12.

from him that deep counsels, unlooked-for resources, courageous deeds, proceed. It was he who invented 'deep-throated engines . . . disgorging, . . . chained thunderbolts, and hail of iron globes,' and won the second day's victory; he who in hell roused his dejected troops, and planned the ruin of man; he who, passing the guarded gates and the endless chaos, amid so many dangers, and across so many obstacles, made man revolt against God, and gained for hell the whole posterity of the new-born. Though defeated, he prevails, since he has won from the monarch on high the third part of his angels, and almost all the sons of his Adam. Though wounded, he triumphs, for the thunder which smote his head, left his heart invincible. Though feebler in force, he remains superior in nobility, since he prefers suffering independence to happy servility, and welcomes his defeat and his torments as a glory, a liberty, and a joy. These are the proud and sombre political passions of the constant though oppressed Puritans; Milton had felt them in the vicissitudes of war, and the emigrants who had taken refuge amongst the panthers and savages of America, found them strong and energetic in the depths of their heart.

'Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
Said then the lost Archangel, this the seat
That we must change for heaven? this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he,
Who now is Sovran, can dispose and bid
What shall be right: farthest from him is best,
Whom reason has equal'd, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrours; hail,
Infernal world! and thou, profoundest hell,
Receive thy new possessour; one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be; all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; the Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy; will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure; and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in hell:
Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.'[1]

This sombre heroism, this harsh obstinacy, this biting irony, these proud stiff arms which clasp grief as a mistress, this concentration of invincible courage which, cast on its own resources, finds everything in itself, this power of passion and sway over passion,—

'The unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book i. *v.* 242-263.

And courage never to submit or yield,
And what is else not to be overcome,'[1]

are features proper to the English character and to English literature, and you will find them later on in Byron's Lara and Conrad.

Around the fallen angel, as within him, all is great. Dante's hell is but a hall of tortures, whose cells, one below another, descend to the deepest wells. Milton's hell is vast and vague:

'A dungeon horrible on all sides round,
As one great furnace, flamed; yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades.[2] . . .
Beyond this flood a frozen continent
Lies, dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms
Of whirlwind, and dire hail which on firm land
Thaws not; but gathers heap, and ruin seems
Of ancient pile.'[3]

The angels gather, innumerable legions:

'As when heaven's fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines,
With singed top their stately growth, though bare,
Stands on the blasted heath.'[4]

Milton needs the grand and infinite; he lavishes them. His eyes are only content in limitless space, and he produces colossuses to fill it. Such is Satan wallowing on the surges of the livid sea:

'In bulk as huge . . . as . . . that sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean stream:
Him, haply, slumbering on the Norway foam,
The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff,
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind
Moors by his side under the lee, while night
Invests the sea, and wished morn delays.'[5]

Spenser has discovered images just as fine, but he has not the tragic gravity which the idea of hell impresses on a Protestant. No poetic creation equals in horror and grandeur the spectacle that greeted Satan on leaving his dungeon:

'At last appear
Hell bounds, high reaching to the horrid roof,
And thrice threefold the gates; three folds were brass,
Three iron, three of adamantine rock,
Impenetrable, impaled with circling fire,
Yet unconsumed. Before the gates there sat

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book i. *v.* 106–109.
[2] *Ibid.* book ii. *v.* 587–591.
[3] *Ibid. v.* 61–65.
[4] *Ibid.* book i. *v.* 612–615.
[5] *Ibid. v.* 196–208.

On either side a formidable shape;
The one seem'd woman to the waist, and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fold
Voluminous and vast, a serpent arm'd
With mortal sting: about her middle round
A cry of hell hounds never ceasing bark'd
With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung
A hideous peal: yet, when they list, would creep,
If aught disturb'd their noise, into her womb,
And kennel there; yet there still bark'd and howl'd
Within unseen. . . . The other shape,
If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
For each seem'd either: black it stood as night,
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
And shook a dreadful dart; what seem'd his head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.
Satan was now at hand, and from his seat
The monster moving onward came as fast,
With horrid strides; hell trembled as he strode.
The undaunted fiend what this might be admired,
Admired, not fear'd.'[1]

The heroic glow of the old soldier of the Civil Wars animates the infernal battle; and if one were to ask why Milton creates things greater than other men, I should answer, because he has a greater heart.

Hence the sublimity of his scenery. If I did not fear the paradox, I should say that this scenery was a school of virtue. Spenser is a smooth glass, which fills us with calm images. Shakspeare is a burning mirror, which overpowers us, one after another, with multiplied and dazzling visions. The one distracts, the other disturbs us. Milton raises our mind. The force of the objects which he describes passes into us; we become great by sympathy with their greatness. Such is the effect of his description of the Creation. The calm and creative command of the Messiah leaves its trace in the heart which listens to it, and we feel more vigour and moral health at the sight of this great work of wisdom and will:

'On heavenly ground they stood; and from the shore
They view'd the vast immeasurable abyss
Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,
Up from the bottom turn'd by furious winds
And surging waves, as mountains, to assault
Heaven's highth, and with the centre mix the pole.
"Silence, ye troubled waves, and thou deep, peace,"
Said then the omnific Word: "your discord end!" . . .
Let there be light, said God; and forthwith light
Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure,
Sprung from the deep; and from her native east

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book ii. *v.* 643–678.

To journey through the aery gloom began,
Sphered in a radiant cloud. . . .
The earth was form'd; but in the womb as yet
Of waters, embryon immature involved,
Appear'd not: over all the face of earth
Main ocean flow'd, not idle; but, with warm
Prolific humour softening all her globe,
Fermented the great mother to conceive,
Satiate with genial moisture; when God said,
"Be gather'd now, ye waters under heaven,
Into one place, and let dry land appear."
Immediately the mountains huge appear
Emergent, and their broad bare backs upheave
Into the clouds; their tops ascend the sky:
So high as heaved the tumid hills, so low
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,
Capacious bed of waters: thither they
Hasted with glad precipitance, uproll'd,
As drops on dust conglobing from the dry.'[1]

This is the primitive scenery; immense bare seas and mountains, as Raphael Sanzio outlines them in the background of his biblical paintings. Milton embraces the general effects, and handles the whole as easily as his Jehovah.

Let us quit superhuman and fanciful spectacles. A simple sunset equals them. Milton peoples it with solemn allegories and regal figures, and the sublime is born in the poet, as just before it was born from the subject:—

'The sun, now fallen . . .
Arraying with reflected purple and gold
The clouds that on his western throne attend.
Now came still evening on, and twilight gray
Had in her sober livery all things clad:
Silence accompanied; for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests,
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;
She all night long her amorous descant sung;
Silence was pleased: now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires: Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length,
Apparent queen, unveil'd her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.'[2]

The changes of the light become here a religious procession of vague beings who fill the soul with veneration. So sanctified, the poet prays. Standing by the nuptial couch of Adam and Eve, he says:—

'Hail, wedded love, mysterious law, true source
Of human offspring, sole propriety
In Paradise of all things common else!

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book vii. *v.* 210-292. [2] *Ibid.* book iv. *v.* 591-609.

By thee adulterous lust was driven from men
Among the bestial herds to range: by thee,
Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,
Relations dear, and all the charities
Of father, son, and brother, first were known.'[1]

He justifies it by the example of saints and patriarchs. He immolates before it bought love and 'court amours,' wanton women and harlots. We are a thousand miles from Shakspeare; and in this Protestant eulogy of the family tie, of lawful love, of 'domestic sweets,' of orderly piety and of home, we perceive a new literature and an altered time.

A strange great man, and a strange spectacle! He was born with the instinct of noble things; and this instinct, strengthened in him by solitary meditation, by accumulated knowledge, by stern logic, becomes changed into a body of maxims and beliefs which no temptation could dissolve, and no reverse shake. Thus fortified, he passes life as a combatant, as a poet, with courageous deeds and splendid dreams, heroic and rude, chimerical and impassioned, generous and calm, like every self-contained reasoner, like every enthusiast, insensible to experience and enamoured of the beautiful. Thrown by the chance of a revolution into politics and theology, he demands for others the liberty which his powerful reason requires, and strikes at the public fetters which impede his personal energy. By the force of his intellect, he is more capable than any one of accumulating science; by the force of his enthusiasm, he is more capable than any of experiencing hatred. Thus armed, he throws himself into controversy with all the clumsiness and barbarism of the time; but this proud logic displays its arguments with a marvellous breadth, and sustains its images with an unwonted majesty: this lofty imagination, after having spread over his prose an array of magnificent figures, carries him into a torrent of passion even to the height of the sublime or excited ode—a sort of archangel's song of adoration or vengeance. The chance of a throne preserved, then re-established, carries him, before the revolution took place, into pagan and moral poetry, after the revolution into Christian and moral verse. In both he aims at the sublime, and inspires admiration; because the sublime is the work of enthusiastic reason, and admiration is the enthusiasm of reason. In both, he arrives at his point by the accumulation of splendours, by the sustained fulness of poetic song, by the greatness of his allegories, the loftiness of his sentiments, the description of infinite objects and heroic emotions. In the first, a lyrist and a philosopher, with a wider poetic freedom, and the creator of a stranger poetic illusion, he produces almost perfect odes and choruses. In the second, an epic writer and a Protestant, enslaved by a strict theology, robbed of the style which makes the supernatural

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book iv. *v.* 750–757.

visible, deprived of the dramatic sensibility which creates varied and living souls, he accumulates cold dissertations, transforms man and God into orthodox and vulgar machines, and only regains his genius in endowing Satan with his republican soul, in multiplying grand sceneries and colossal apparitions, in consecrating his poetry to the praise of religion and duty.

Placed, as it happened, between two ages, he participates in their two characters, as a stream which, flowing between two different soils, is tinged by their two hues. A poet and a Protestant, he receives from the closing age the free poetic afflatus, and from the opening age the severe political religion. He employed the one in the service of the other, and displayed the old inspiration in new subjects. In his works we recognise two Englands: one impassioned for the beautiful, devoted to the emotions of an unshackled sensibility and the fancies of pure imagination, with no law but the natural feelings, and no religion but natural belief; voluntarily pagan, often immoral; such as it is exhibited by Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Shakspeare, Spenser, and the superb harvest of poets which covered the ground for a space of fifty years: the other fortified by a practical religion, void of metaphysical invention, altogether political, with worship and law, attached to measured, sensible, useful, narrow opinions, praising the virtues of the family, armed and stiffened by a rigid morality, driven into prose, raised to the highest degree of power, wealth, and liberty. In this sense, this style and these ideas are monuments of history: they concentrate, recall, or anticipate the past and the future; and in the limits of a single work are found the events and the feelings of several centuries and of a whole nation.

BOOK III.

THE CLASSIC AGE.

CHAPTER I.

The Restoration.

1. The Roisterers.

I. The excesses of Puritanism—How they induce excesses of sensuality.

II. Picture of these manners by a stranger—The *Mémoires de Grammont*—Difference of debauchery in France and England.

III. Butler's *Hudibras*—Platitude of his comic style, and harshness of his rancorous style.

IV. Baseness, cruelty, brutality, debauchery of the court—Rochester, his life, poems, style, morals.

V. Philosophy consonant with these manners—Hobbes, his spirit and his style—His curtailments and his discoveries—His mathematical method—In how much he resembles Descartes—His morality, æsthetics, politics, logic, psychology, metaphysics—Spirit and aim of his philosophy.

VI. The theatre—Alteration in taste, and in the public—Audiences before and after the Restoration.

VII. Dryden—Disparity of his comedies—Gaucherie of his indecencies—How he translates Molière's *Amphitryon*.

VIII. Wycherley—Life—Character—Melancholy, greed, immodesty—*Love in a Wood, Country Wife, Dancing Master*—Licentious pictures, and repugnant details—His energy and realism—Parts of Olivia and Manly in his *Plain Dealer*—Certain words of Milton.

2. The Worldlings.

I. Appearance of the worldly life in Europe—Its conditions and causes—How it was established in England—Etiquette, amusements, conversations, manners, and talents of the drawing-room.

II. Dawn of the classic spirit in Europe—Its origin—Its nature—Difference of conversation under Elizabeth and Charles II.

III. Sir William Temple—His life, character, spirit, and style.

IV. Writers of fashion—Their correct language and gallant bearing—Sir Charles Sedley, the Earl of Dorset, Edmund Waller—His opinions and style—

Wherein consists his polish—Wherein he is not sufficiently polished—Culture of style—Lack of poetry—Character of monarchical and classic style.

V. Sir John Denham—His poem of *Cooper's Hill*—Oratorical swell of his verse—English seriousness of his moral preoccupations—How people of fashion and literary men followed then the fashions of France.

VI. The comic-authors—Comparison of this theatre with that of Molière—Arrangement of ideas in Molière—General ideas in Molière—How with Molière the odious is concealed, while the truth is depicted—How in Molière the honest man is still the man of the world—How the honest man of Molière is a French type.

VII. Action—Complication of intrigues—Frivolity of purpose—Crudeness of the characters—Grossness of manners—Wherein consists the talent of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar—Kind of characters they are able to produce.

VIII. Natural characters—*Sir John Brute*, the husband; *Squire Sullen*—*Sir Tunbelly*, the father—*Miss Hoyden*, the young lady—*Squire Humphry*, the young gentleman—Idea of nature according to this theatre.

IX. Artificial characters—Women of the world—*Miss Prue*, *Lady Wishfort*, *Lady Pliant*, *Mrs Millamant*—Men of the world—*Mirabell*—Idea of society according to this theatre—Why this culture and this literature have not produced durable works—Wherein they are opposed to the English character—Transformation of taste and manners.

X. The continuation of comedy—Sheridan—Life—Talent—*The School for Scandal*—How comedy degenerates and is extinguished—Causes of the decay of the theatre in Europe and in England.

1. The Roisterers.

WHEN we alternately look at the works of the court painters of Charles I. and Charles II., and pass from the noble portraits of Van Dyk to the figures of Lely, the fall is sudden and great; we have left a palace, and we light on a bagnio.

Instead of the proud and dignified lords, at once cavaliers and courtiers, instead of those fine yet simple ladies who look at the same time princesses and modest maidens, instead of that generous and heroic company, elegant and resplendent, in whom the spirit of the Renaissance yet survived, but who already displayed the refinement of the modern age, we are confronted by perilous and importunate courtesans, with an expression either vile or harsh, incapable of shame or of remorse.[1] Their plump smooth hands toy fondlingly with their dimpled fingers; ringlets of heavy hair fall on their bare shoulders; their swimming eyes languish voluptuously; an insipid smile hovers on their sensual lips. One is lifting a mass of dishevelled hair which streams over the curves of her rosy flesh; another languishingly, and without constraint, uncloses a sleeve whose soft folds display the full whiteness of her arms. Nearly

[1] See especially the portraits of Lady Morland, Lady Williams, the Countess of Ossory, the Duchess of Cleveland, Lady Price, and many others.

all are half-draped; many of them seem to be just rising from their beds; the rumpled dressing-gown clings to the neck, and looks as though it were soiled by the night's debauch; the tumbled undergarment slips down to the hips: their feet crumple the bright and glossy silk. Though shameless, with bosoms uncovered, they are decked out in all the luxurious extravagance of prostitutes; diamond girdles, puffs of lace, the vulgar splendour of gilt, a superfluity of embroidered and rustling fabrics, enormous head-dresses, the curls and fringes of which, rolled up and sticking out, compel notice by the very height of their shameless magnificence. Folding curtains hang round them in the shape of an alcove, and the eyes penetrate through a vista into the recesses of a wide park, whose solitude will not ill serve the purpose of their pleasures.

I.

All this came by way of contrast; Puritanism had brought on an orgie, and fanatics had talked down the virtues. For many years the gloomy English imagination, possessed by religious terrors, had desolated the life of men. Conscience had become disturbed at the thought of death and the dark eternity; half-expressed doubts swarmed within like a bed of thorns, and the sick heart, starting at every emotion, had ended by taking a disgust at all its pleasures, and a horror at all its natural instincts. Thus poisoned at its spring, the divine sentiment of justice became a mournful madness. Man, confessedly perverse and condemned, believed himself pent in a prison-house of perdition and vice, into which no effort and no chance could dart a ray of light, except a hand from above should come by free grace, to rend the sealed stone of the tomb. Men lived the life of the condemned, amid torments and anguish, oppressed by a gloomy despair, haunted by spectres. Such a one would frequently imagine himself at the point of death; another was weighed down by his grievous hallucinations as by a cross; some would feel within them the motions of an evil spirit; one and all passed the night with their eyes chained to the tales of blood and the impassioned appeals of the Old Testament, listening to the threats and thunders of a terrible God, and renewing in their own hearts the ferocity of murderers and the exaltation of seers. Under such a strain reason gradually left them. While seeking after their Lord, they found but a dream. After long hours of exhaustion, they laboured under a warped and overwrought imagination. Dazzling forms, unwonted ideas, sprang up on a sudden in their heated brain; men were raised and penetrated by extraordinary emotions. So transformed, they knew themselves no longer; they did not ascribe to themselves these violent and sudden inspirations which were forced upon them, which compelled them out of the beaten tracks, which had no connection one with another, which shook and enlightened them when least expected, without being able either to check or to govern them; they saw in them the

agency of a supernatural power, and gave themselves up with enthusiasm to the madness and the stubbornness of faith.

To crown all, the nature of fanaticism had been changed; the sectary had laid down all the steps of mental transfiguration, and reduced the encroachment of his dream to a theory: he set about methodically to drive out reason and enthrone ecstasy. George Fox wrote its history, Bunyan gave it its laws, Parliament worked out its type, all the pulpits lauded its practice. Artisans, soldiers, women discussed it, mastered it, encouraged one another by the details of their experience and the publicity of their exaltations. A new life was inaugurated which had blighted and expelled the old. All secular tastes were suppressed, all sensual joys forbidden; the spiritual man alone remained standing upon the ruins of the past, and the heart, debarred from all its natural safety-valves, could only direct its views or aspirations towards a sinister Deity. The typical Puritan walked slowly along the streets, his eyes raised towards heaven, with elongated features, yellow and haggard, with cropt hair, clad in brown or black, unadorned, clothed only to cover his nakedness. If a man had round cheeks, he passed for lukewarm.[1] The whole body, the exterior, the very tone of his voice, all must wear the sign of penitence and divine grace. Man spoke slowly, with a solemn and somewhat nasal tone of voice, as if to destroy the vivacity of conversation and the melody of the natural voice. His speech stuffed with scriptural quotations, his style borrowed from the prophets, his name and the names of his children drawn from the Bible, bore witness that his thoughts were confined to the terrible world of the seers and ministers of divine vengeance. From within, the contagion spread outwards. The fears of conscience were converted into laws of the state. Personal asceticism grew into public tyranny. The Puritan proscribed pleasure as an enemy, for others as well as for himself. Parliament closed the gambling-houses and theatres, and had the actors whipped at the cart's tail; oaths were fined; the May-trees were cut down; the bears, whose fights amused the people, were put to death; the plaster of Puritan masons reduced nude statues to decency; the beautiful poetic festivals were forbidden. Fines and corporal punishments shut out, even from children, games, dancing, bell-ringing, rejoicings, junketings, wrestling, the chase, all exercises and amusements which might profane the Sabbath. The ornaments, pictures, and statues in the churches were pulled down or mutilated. The only pleasure which they retained and permitted was the singing of psalms through the nose, the edification of long sermons, the excitement of acrimonious controversies, the eager and sombre joy of a victory gained over the enemy of mankind, and of the tyranny exercised against the demon's supposed abettors. In Scotland, a colder and sterner land, intolerance reached the utmost limits of ferocity and

[1] Colonel Hutchinson was at one time held in suspicion because he wore long hair and dressed well.

pettiness, instituting a surveillance over the private life and the secret devotions of every member of a family, depriving Catholics of their children, imposing an oath of abjuration under pain of perpetual imprisonment or death, dragging crowds of witches[1] to the stake.[2] It seemed as though a black cloud had weighed down the life of man, drowning all light, wiping out all beauty, extinguishing all joy, pierced here and there by the glitter of the sword and by the flickering of torches, beneath which one might perceive the indistinct forms of gloomy despots, of bilious sectarians, of silent victims.

II.

The king once re-established, a deliverance ensued. Like a checked and flooded stream, public opinion dashed with all its natural force and all its acquired momentum, into the bed from which it had been debarred. The outburst carried away the dams. The violent return to the senses drowned morality. Virtue had the semblance of Puritanism. Duty and fanaticism became mingled in a common reproach. In this great reaction, devotion and honesty, swept away together, left to mankind but the wreck and the mire. The more excellent parts of human nature disappeared; there remained but the animal, without bridle or guide, urged by his desires beyond justice and shame.

When we see these manners in a Hamilton or a Saint Évremond, we can tolerate them. Their French varnish deceives us. Debauchery in a Frenchman is only half disgusting; with them, if the animal breaks loose, it is without abandoning itself to excess. The foundation is not,

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[1] 1648; thirty in one day. One of them confessed that she had been at a gathering of more than five hundred witches.—*Pictorial History*, iii. 489.

[2] In 1652, the kirk-session of Glasgow 'brot boyes and servants before them, for breaking the Sabbath, and other faults. They had clandestine censors, and gave money to some for this end.'—Note 28, taken from *Wodrow's Collection;* Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, 3 vols. 1867, iii. 208.

Even yearly in the eighteenth century, 'the most popular divines' in Scotland affirmed that Satan 'frequently appears clothed in a corporeal substance.'—*Ibid.* iii. 233, note 76, taken from *Memoirs of C. L. Lewes.*

'No husband shall kiss his wife, and no mother shall kiss her child on the Sabbath day.'—*Ibid.* iii. 253, note from Revd. Lyon, with regard to government of a colony.

'(Sept. 22, 1649) The quhilk day the Sessioune caused mak this act, that ther sould be no pypers at brydels,' etc.—*Ibid.* iii. 258, note 153. In 1719, the Presbytery of Edinburgh indignantly declares: 'Yea, some have arrived at that height of impiety, as not to be ashamed of washing in waters, and swimming in rivers upon the holy Sabbath.'—*Ibid.* iii. 266, note 187.

'I think David had never so sweet a time as then, when he was pursued as a partridge by his son Absalom.'—Gray's *Great and Precious Promises.*

See the whole of chapter iii. vol. iii., in which Buckle has described, by similar quotations, the condition of Scotland, chiefly in the seventeenth century.

as with the Englishman, coarse and powerful. You may break the glittering ice which covers him, without bringing down upon yourself the swollen and muddy torrent that roars beneath his neighbour;[1] the stream which will issue from it will only have its petty dribblings, and will return quickly and of itself to its accustomed channel. The Frenchman is mild, naturally refined, little inclined to great or gross sensuality, affecting a sober style of talk, easily armed against filthy manners by his delicacy and good taste. The Count de Grammont has too much wit to love an orgie. After all, an orgie is not pleasant; the breaking of glasses, brawling, lewd talk, gluttony in eating and drinking,—there is nothing in this very tempting to a delicate disposition: the Frenchman, after Grammont's type, is born an epicurean, not a glutton or a drunkard. What he seeks is amusement, not unrestrained joy or bestial pleasure. I know well that he is not void of reproach. I would not trust him with my purse, he forgets too readily the distinction between *meum* and *tuum;* above all, I would not trust him with my wife: he is not over-delicate; his escapades at the gaming-table and with women smack too much of the sharper and the false-swearer. But I am wrong to use these big words in connection with him; they are too weighty, they crush so delicate and so pretty a specimen of humanity. These heavy habits of honour or shame can only be worn by a serious class of men, and Grammont takes nothing seriously, neither his fellow-men, nor himself, nor vice, nor virtue. To pass his time agreeably is his sole endeavour. 'They had said good-bye to dulness in the army,' observed Hamilton, 'as soon as he was there.' That is his pride and his aim; he troubles himself, and cares for nothing beside. His valet robs him: another would have brought the rogue to the gallows; but the theft was clever, and he keeps his rascal. He left England forgetting to marry the girl he was betrothed to; he is caught at Dover; he returns and marries her: this was an amusing *contretemps;* he asks for nothing better. One day, being penniless, he fleeces the Count de Caméran at play. 'Could Grammont, after the figure he had once cut, pack off like any common fellow? By no means; he is a man of feeling; he will maintain the honour of France.' He covers his cheating at play with a joke; at bottom, his notions of property are not over-clear. He regales Caméran with Caméran's own money; would Caméran have done it better, or otherwise? What matter if his money be in Grammont's purse or his own? The main point is arrived at, since there is pleasure in getting the money, and there is pleasure in spending it. The hateful and the ignoble vanish from a life conducted thus. If he pays his court to princes, you may be sure it is not on his knees; so lively a soul is not weighed down by respect; his wit places him on a level with the greatest; under pretext of amusing the king, he tells

[1] See, in Richardson, Swift, and Fielding, but particularly in Hogarth, the delineation of this brutish debauchery.

him plain truths.[1] If he finds himself in London, surrounded by open debauchery, he does not plunge into it; he passes through on tiptoe, and so daintily that the mire does not stick to him. We do not recognise any longer in his anecdotes the anguish and the brutality which the circumstances actually conceal; the narrative flows on quickly, raising a smile, then another, and another yet, so that the mind is brought by an adroit and easy progress to something like good humour. At table, Grammont will never stuff himself; at play, he will never grow violent; with his mistress, he will never give vent to coarse talk; in a duel, he will not hate his adversary. The wit of a Frenchman is like French wine; it makes men neither brutal, nor wicked, nor gloomy. Such is the spring of these pleasures: a supper will destroy neither the delicacy, nor the good nature, nor the enjoyment. The libertine remains sociable, polished, obliging; his gaiety culminates only in the gaiety of others;[2] he is attentive to them as naturally as to himself; and in addition, he is ever on the alert and in a mood for intellectual exertion: sallies, flashes of brilliancy, witty speeches, sparkle on his lips; he can think at table and in company, sometimes better than if alone or sober. It is clear that with him debauchery does not extinguish the man; Grammont would say that it perfects him, that wit, the heart, the intelligence only arrive at excellence and true enjoyment, amid the elegance and animation of a choice supper.

III.

It is quite the contrary in England. When we scratch the covering of an Englishman's morality, the brute appears in its violence and its deformity. One of the English statesmen said that with the French an unchained mob could be led by words of humanity and honour, but that in England it was necessary, in order to appease them, to throw to them raw flesh. Violence, blood, orgie, that is the food on which this mob of noblemen precipitated itself. All that excuses a carnival was absent; and, in particular, wit. Three years after the return of the king, Butler published his *Hudibras;* and with what *éclat* his contemporaries only could tell, while the echo is sustained down to our own days. How mean is the wit, with what awkwardness and dulness he dilutes his splenetic satire! Here and there lurks a happy picture, the remnant of a poetry which has just perished; but the whole material of the work reminds one of a Scarron, as unworthy as the other, and more malignant. It is written, they say, on the model of

[1] The king was playing at backgammon; a doubtful throw occurs: 'Ah, here is Grammont, who 'll decide for us; Grammont, come and decide.' 'Sire, you have lost.' 'What! you do not yet know.' . . . 'Ah, Sire, if the throw had been merely doubtful, these gentlemen would not have failed to say you had won.'

[2] Hamilton says of Grammont, 'He sought out the unfortunate only to succour them.'

Don Quixote; Hudibras is a Puritan knight, who goes about, like his antitype, redressing wrongs, and pocketing beatings. It would be truer to say that it resembles the wretched imitation of Avellaneda.[1] The short metre, well suited to buffoonery, hobbles along without rest on its crutches, floundering in the mud which it delights in, as foul and as dull as that of the *Enéide Travestie*.[2] The description of Hudibras and his horse occupies the best part of a canto; forty lines are taken up by describing his beard, forty more by describing his shoes. Endless scholastic discussions, arguments as long as those of the Puritans, spread their wastes and briars over half the poem. No action, no nature, all is would-be satire and gross caricature; neither art, nor harmony, nor good taste: the Puritan style is converted into a harsh gibberish; and the engalled rancour, missing its aim by its mere excess, spoils the portrait it wishes to draw. Would you believe that such a writer gives himself airs, wishes to enliven us, pretends to be funny? What delicate raillery is there in this picture of Hudibras' beard!

'His tawny beard was th' equal grace
Both of his wisdom and his face;
In cut and die so like a tile,
A sudden view it would beguile:
The upper part whereof was whey,
The nether orange, mix'd with grey.
The hairy meteor did denounce
The fall of sceptres and of crowns:
With grisly type did represent
Declining age of government,
And tell with hieroglyphic spade
Its own grave and the state's were made.'[3]

Butler is so well satisfied with his insipid fun, that he prolongs it for a good many lines:

'Like Samson's heart-breakers, it grew
In time to make a nation rue;
Tho' it contributed its own fall,
To wait upon the public downfall. . . .
'Twas bound to suffer persecution
And martyrdom with resolution;
T' oppose itself against the hate
And vengeance of the incens'd state,
In whose defiance it was worn,
Still ready to be pull'd and torn,

[1] A Spanish author, who continued and imitated Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

[2] A work by Scarron. *Hudibras*, ed. Z. Grey, 1801, 2 vols., i. canto i. *v.* 289, says also:

'For as Æneas bore his sire
Upon his shoulder through the fire,
Our knight did bear no less a pack
Of his own buttocks on his back.'

[3] *Hudibras*, part i. canto i. *v.* 241–250.

With red-hot irons to be tortur'd,
Revil'd, and spit upon, and martyr'd.
Maugre all which, 'twas to stand fast
As long as monarchy should last;
But when the state should hap to reel,
'Twas to submit to fatal steel,
And fall, as it was consecrate,
A sacrifice to fall of state,
Whose thread of life the fatal sisters
Did twist together with its whiskers,
And twine so close, that time should never,
In life or death, their fortunes sever;
But with his rusty sickle mow
Both down together at a blow.'[1]

Could any one have taken pleasure in humour such as this:

'This sword a dagger had, his page,
That was but little for his age;
And therefore waited on him so
As dwarfs upon knights-errant do. . . .
When it had stabb'd, or broke a head,
It would scrape trenchers, or chip bread. . . .
'Twould make clean shoes, and in the earth
Set leeks and onions, and so forth.'[2]

Everything turns on the trivial: if any beauty presents itself, it is spoiled by burlesque. To read those long details of the kitchen, those boisterous and crude jokes, one might fancy oneself in the company of a common buffoon in the market; it is the talk of the quacks on the bridges, adapting their imagination and language to the manners of the beer-shop and the hovel. There is filth to be met with there: in short, the rabble will laugh when the mountebank alludes to the disgusting acts of private life.[3] Such is the grotesque stuff in which the courtiers of the Restoration delighted; their spite and their coarseness took a pleasure

[1] *Hudibras*, part i. canto i. *v.* 253–280. [2] *Ibid. v.* 375–386.

[3] 'Quoth Hudibras, I smell a rat.
Ralpho, thou dost prevaricate;
For though the thesis which thou lay'st
Be true *ad amussim* as thou say'st
(For that bear-baiting should appear
Jure divino, lawfuller
Than Synods are, thou do'st deny,
Totidem verbis; so do I),
Yet there is fallacy in this;
For if by thy *homœosis*,
Tussis pro crepitu, . . .
Thou wouldst sophistically imply,
Both are unlawful, I deny.'
Part i. canto i. *v.* 821–834.

in the spectacle of these bawling puppets; even now, after two centuries, we hear the ribald laughter of this audience of lackeys.

IV.

Charles II., when at his meals, ostentatiously drew Grammont's attention to the fact that his officers served him on their knees. They were in the right; it was their fit posture. Lord Chancellor Clarendon, one of the most honoured and honest men of the Court, learns suddenly and in full council that his daughter Anne is *enceinte* by the Duke of York, and that the duke, the king's brother, has promised her marriage. Listen to the words of this tender father; he has himself taken care to hand them down:

'The Chancellor broke out into a very immoderate passion against the wickedness of his daughter, and said with all imaginable earnestness, "that as soon as he came home, he would turn her (his daughter) out of his house as a strumpet to shift for herself, and would never see her again."'[1]

Observe that this great man had received the news from the king unprepared, and that he made use of these fatherly expressions on the spur of the moment. He added, 'that he had much rather his daughter should be the duke's whore than his wife.' Is this not heroical? But let Clarendon speak for himself. Only such a true monarchical heart can surpass itself:

'He was ready to give a positive judgment, in which he hoped their lordships would concur with him; that the king should immediately cause the woman to be sent to the Tower, and to be cast into a dungeon under so strict a guard, that no person living should be admitted to come to her: and then that an act of parliament should be immediately passed for the cutting off her head,' to which he would not only give his consent, but would very willingly be the first man that should propose it.'[2]

What Roman virtue! Afraid of not being believed, he insists; whoever knew the man, will believe that he said all this very heartily. He is not yet satisfied; he repeats his advice; he addresses to the king different conclusive reasonings, in order that they might cut off the head of his daughter:

'I had rather submit and bear it (this disgrace) with all humility, than that it should be repaired by making her his wife, the thought whereof I do so much abominate, that I had much rather see her dead, with all the infamy that is due to her presumption.'[3]

In this manner, a man, who is in a difficulty, can keep his salary and his Chancellor's robes. Sir Charles Berkley, captain of the Duke of York's guards, did better still; he solemnly swore 'that he had lain

[1] *The Life of Clarendon*, ed. by himself, new ed., 1827, 3 vols., i. 378.
[2] *Ibid.* i. 379.
[3] *Ibid.* i. 380.

with the young lady,' and declared himself ready to marry her 'for the sake of the duke, though he knew well the familiarity the duke had with her.' Then, shortly afterwards, he confessed that he had lied, but in all good intention, in all honour, in order to save the royal family from such a *mésalliance*. This admirable self-devotion was rewarded; he soon had a pension from the privy purse, and was created Earl of Falmouth. From the first, the baseness of the public corporations rivalled that of individuals. The House of Commons, but recently master of the country, still full of Presbyterians, rebels, and conquerors, voted 'that neither themselves nor the people of England could be freed from the horrid guilt of the late unnatural rebellion, or from the punishment which that guilt merited, unless they formally availed themselves of his Majesty's grace and pardon, as set forth in the declaration of Breda.'[1] Then all these heroes went in a body and threw themselves with contrition at the sacred feet of their monarch. In this universal weakness it seemed that no one had any courage left. The king became the hireling of Louis XIV., and sold his country for a pension of £200,000. Ministers, members of Parliament, ambassadors, all received French money. The contagion spread even to patriots, to men noted for their purity, to martyrs. Lord Russell intrigued with Versailles; Algernon Sidney accepted 500 guineas. They had not discrimination enough to retain a show of spirit; they had not spirit enough to retain a show of honour.[2]

In men so degraded, the first thing that strikes you is the bloodthirsty instinct of brute beasts. Sir John Coventry, a member of Parliament, had let some word escape him, which was construed into a reproach of the royal amours. His friend, the Duke of Monmouth, contrived that he should be treacherously assaulted under the king's command, by respectable men devoted to his service, who slit his nose to the bone. A vile wretch of the name of Blood tried to assassinate the Duke of Ormond, and to stab the guardian of the Tower, in order to steal the crown and jewels. Charles II., considering that this was an interesting and distinguished man of his kind, pardoned him, gave him an estate in Ireland, and admitted him to his presence, side by

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[1] *Pictorial History*, iii. 664.

[2] 'Mr. Evelyn tells me of several of the menial servants of the Court lacking bread, that have not received a farthing wages since the King's coming in.'—*Pepys' Diary*, ed. Lord Braybrooke, 3d ed., 1848, 5 vols., iv. April 26, 1667.

'Mr. Povy says that to this day the King do follow the women as much as he ever did; that the Duke of York . . . . hath come out of his wife's bed, and gone to others laid in bed for him; . . . . that the family (of the duke) is in horrible disorder by being in debt by spending above £60,000 per annum, when he hath not £40,000' (*Ibid.* iv. June 23, 1667).

'It is certain that, as it now is, the seamen of England, in my conscience, would, if they could, go over and serve the king of France or Holland rather than us' (*Ibid.* iv. June 25, 1667).

side with the Duke of Ormond, so that Blood became a sort of hero, and was received in society. After such splendid examples, men dared everything. The Duke of Buckingham, a lover of the Countess of Shrewsbury, slew the Earl in a duel; the Countess, disguised as a page, held Buckingham's horse, while she embraced him, covered as he was with her husband's blood; and the murderers and adulterers returned publicly, as in a triumphal march, to the house of the dead man. One can no longer wonder at hearing Count Königsmark describe as a 'peccadillo' an assassination which he had committed by waylaying his victim. I transcribe a duel out of Pepys, to give a notion of the manners of these soldier cut-throats:—

'Sir H. Bellassis and Tom Porter, the greatest friends in the world, were talking together: and Sir H. Bellassis talked a little louder than ordinary to Tom Porter, giving of him some advice. Some of the company standing by said, "What! are they quarrelling, that they talk so high?" Sir H. Bellassis, hearing it, said, "No!" says he: "I would have you know I never quarrel, but I strike; and take that as a rule of mine!" "How?" says Tom Porter, "strike! I would I could see the man in England that durst give me a blow!" with that Sir H. Bellassis did give him a box of the eare; and so they were going to fight there, but were hindered. . . . Tom Porter, being informed that Sir H. Bellassis' coach was coming, went out of the coffee-house where he staid for the tidings, and stopped the coach, and bade Sir H. Bellassis come out. "Why," says H. Bellassis, "you will not hurt me coming out, will you?" "No," says Tom Porter. So out he went, and both drew. . . . They wounded one another, and Sir H. Bellassis so much that it is feared he will die,' which he did ten days after.[1]

Bull-dogs like these, were not to be expected to take pity on their enemies. The Restoration opened with a butchery. The Lords conducted the trials of the republicans with a shamelessness of cruelty and an excess of rancour that were extraordinary. A sheriff struggled with Sir Harry Vane on the scaffold, rummaging his pockets, and taking from him a paper which he attempted to read. During the trial of Major-General Harrison, the hangman was placed by his side, in a black dress, with a rope in his hand; they sought to give him a full enjoyment of the foretaste of death. He was cut down alive from the gibbet, and disembowelled; he saw his entrails cast into the fire; he was then quartered, and his still beating heart was torn out and shown to the people. The cavaliers gathered round for amusement. Here and there one of them would do worse even than this. Colonel Turner, seeing them quarter John Coke, the lawyer, told the sheriff's men to bring Hugh Peters, another of the condemned, nearer; the executioner came up, and rubbing his bloody hands, asked the unfortunate man if the work pleased him. The rotting bodies of Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw were dug up in the night, and their heads fixed on poles over Westminster Hall. Ladies went to see these disgraceful scenes;

[1] *Pepys' Diary*, vol. iv., 29th July 1667.

the good Evelyn applauded them; the courtiers made songs on them. These people were fallen so low, that they did not even turn sick at it. Sight and smell no longer brought a natural repugnance; their senses were as dead as their hearts.

From carnage they threw themselves into debauchery. You should read the life of the Earl of Rochester, a courtier and a poet, who was the hero of the time. His manners were those of a lawless and wretched mountebank; his delight was to haunt the stews, to debauch women, to write filthy songs and lewd pamphlets; he spent his time between scandal with the maids of honour, broils with men of letters, the receiving of insults, the giving of blows. By way of playing the gallant, he eloped with his wife before he married her. To make a display of scepticism, he ended by declining a duel, and gained the name of a coward. For five years together he was said to be drunk. The spirit within him failing of a worthy outlet, plunged him into adventures more befitting a clown. Once with the Duke of Buckingham he rented an inn on the Newmarket road, and turned innkeeper, supplying the husbands with drink and defiling their wives. He introduced himself, disguised as an old woman, into the house of a miser, robbed him of his wife, and passed her on to Buckingham. The husband hanged himself; they made very merry over the affair. At another time he disguised himself as a chairman, then as a beggar, and paid court to the gutter-girls. He ended by turning charlatan, astrologer, and vendor of drugs for procuring abortion, in the suburbs. It was the licentiousness of a fervid imagination, which fouled itself as another would have adorned it, which forced its way into lewdness and folly as another would have done into sense and beauty. What can come of love in hands like these? One cannot copy even the titles of his poems; they were written only for the haunts of vice. Stendhal said that love is like a dried up bough cast into a mine; the crystals cover it, spread out into filagree work, and end by converting the worthless stick into a sparkling tuft of the purest diamonds. Rochester begins by depriving love of all its adornment, and to make sure of grasping it, converts it into a stick. Every refined sentiment, every fancy; the enchantment, the serene, sublime glow which transforms in a moment this wretched world of ours; the illusion which, uniting all the powers of our being, shows us perfection in a finite creature, and eternal bliss in a transient emotion,—all has vanished; there remain but satiated appetites and palled senses. The worst of it is, that he writes without spirit, and methodically enough. He has no natural ardour, no picturesque sensuality; his satires prove him a disciple of Boileau. Nothing is more disgusting than obscenity in cold blood. One can endure the obscene works of Giulio Romano, and his Venetian voluptousness, because in them genius sets off sensuality, and the loveliness of the splendid coloured draperies transforms an orgie into a work of art. We pardon Rabelais, when we have entered into the deep current of manly joy and vigour, with which

his feasts abound. We can hold our nose and have done with it, while we follow with admiration, and even sympathy, the torrent of ideas and fancies which flows through his mire. But to see a man trying to be elegant and remaining coarse, endeavouring to paint the sentiments of a navvy in the language of a man of the world, who tries to find a suitable metaphor for every kind of obscenity, who plays the blackguard studiously and deliberately, who, excused neither by character, nor the glow of fancy, nor science, nor genius, degrades a good style of writing to such a work,—it is like a rascal who sets himself to sully a set of gems in a gutter. The end of all is but disgust and sickness. While La Fontaine continues to the last day capable of tenderness and happiness, this man at the age of thirty insults the weaker sex with spiteful malignity:

'When she is young, she whores herself for sport;
And when she's old, she bawds for her support. . . .
She is a snare, a shamble, and a stews;
Her meat and sauce she does for lechery chuse,
And does in laziness delight the more,
Because by that she is provoked to whore.
Ungrateful, treacherous, enviously inclined,
Wild beasts are tamed, floods easier far confined,
Than is her stubborn and rebellious mind. . . .
Her temper so extravagant we find,
She hates or is impertinently kind.
Would she be grave, she then looks like a devil,
And like a fool or whore, when she be civil. . . .
Contentious, wicked, and not fit to trust,
And covetous to spend it on her lust.'[1]

What a confession is such a judgment! what an abstract of life! You see the roisterer dulled at the end of his career, dried up like a mummy, eaten away by ulcers. Amid the choruses, the crude satires, the remembrance of abortive plans, the sullied enjoyments which are heaped up in his wearied brain as in a sink, the fear of damnation is fermenting; he dies a devotee at the age of thirty-three years.

At the head of all, the king sets the example. This 'old goat,' as the courtiers call him, imagines himself a man of gaiety and elegance. What gaiety! what elegance! French manners do not suit men beyond the Channel. Catholics, they fall into a narrow superstition; epicureans, into gross debauchery; courtiers, into a base servility; sceptics, into a vulgar atheism. The court in England could imitate only French furniture and dress. The regular and decent exterior which public taste maintained at Versailles, was here dispensed with as troublesome. Charles and his brother, in their state dress, would set off running as in a carnival. On the day when the Dutch fleet burned the English

[1] It is doubtful if these lines are Rochester's, at least I have not been able to find them in any edition of his works.—TR.

ships in the Thames, the king supped with the Duchess of Monmouth, and amused himself by chasing a moth. In council, while business was being transacted, he would be playing with his dog. Rochester and Buckingham insulted him by insolent repartees or dissolute epigrams; he would fly into a passion and suffer them to go on. He quarrelled with his mistress in public; she called him an idiot, and he called her a jade. He would leave her in the morning, 'so that the very sentrys speak of it.'[1] He suffered her to play him false before the eyes of all; at one time she received a couple of actors, one of whom was a mountebank. If need were, she would use abusive language to him. 'The King hath declared that he did not get the child of which she is conceived at this time. But she told him, '. . .! but you shall own it.'[2] Whereupon he did acknowledge the child, and took to himself a couple of actresses for consolation. When his new wife, Catherine of Braganza, arrived, he drove away her attendants, used coarse language to her, that he might force on her the familiarities of his mistress, and finished by degrading her to a friendship such as this. The good Pepys, notwithstanding his loyal heart, ends by saying, 'Having heard the King and the Duke talk, and seeing and observing their habits of intercourse, God forgive me, though I admire them with all the duty possible, yet the more a man considers and observes them, the less he finds of difference between them and other men, though, blessed be God! they are both princes of great nobleness and spirits.'[3] He heard that, on a certain day, the king was with Mrs. Stewart 'into corners, together, and will be with her half an hour, kissing her to the observation of all the world.'[4] Another day, Captain Ferrers told him 'how, at a ball at Court, a child was dropped by one of the ladies in dancing.' They took it off in a handkerchief, 'and the King had it in his closet a week after, and did dissect it, making great sport of it.'[5] These ghastly freaks about such vile events make one shudder. The courtiers went with the stream. Miss Jennings, who became Duchess of Tyrconnel, disguised herself one day as an orange girl, and cried her wares in the street.[6] Pepys recounts festivities in which lords and ladies smeared one another's faces with candle-grease and soot, 'till most of us were like devils.' It was the fashion to swear, to relate scandalous adventures, to get drunk, to prate against the preachers and Scripture, to gamble. Lady Castlemaine in one night lost £25,000. The Duke of St. Albans, a blind man, eighty years old, went to the gambling-house with an attendant at his side to tell him the cards. Sedley and Buckhurst stripped nearly naked, and ran through the streets after midnight. Another, in the open day, stood naked at the window to address the people. I let Grammont keep

[1] *Pepys' Diary*, ii. January 1, 1662–1663.
[2] *Ibid.* iv. July 30, 1667.
[3] *Ibid.* iii. July 25, 1665.
[4] *Ibid.* ii. Nov. 9, 1663.
[5] *Ibid.* ii. Feb. 8, 17, 1662–3.
[6] *Ibid.* Feb. 20, 1664–1665.

to himself his accounts of the maids of honour brought to bed, and of unnatural lusts. We must either exhibit or conceal them, and I have not the courage lightly to insinuate them, after his fashion. I end by a quotation from Pepys, which will serve for example: 'Here I first understood by their talk the meaning of company that lately were called Ballers; Harris telling how it was by a meeting of some young blades, where he was among them, and my Lady Bennet and her ladies; and their dancing naked, and all the roguish things in the world.'[1] The marvellous thing is, that this fair is not even gay; these people were misanthropic, and became morose; they quote the gloomy Hobbes, and he is their master. In fact, the philosophy of Hobbes shall give us the last word and the last characteristics of this society.

V.

Hobbes was one of those powerful, limited, and, as they are called, positive minds so common in England, of the school of Swift and Bentham, efficacious and remorseless as an iron machine. Hence we find in him a method and style of surprising dryness and vigour, most adapted to build up and pull down; hence a philosophy which, by the audacity of its teaching, has placed in an undying light one of the indestructible appearances of the human mind. In every object, every event, there is some primitive and constant fact, which forms, as it were, the nucleus around which group themselves the various developments which complete it. The positive mind strikes down immediately upon this nucleus, crushes the brilliant growth which covers it; disperses, annihilates it; then, concentrating upon it the full force of its violent grasp, loosens it, raises it up, pares it down, and lifts it into a conspicuous position, from whence it may henceforth shine out to all men and for all time like a crystal. All ornament, all emotions, are excluded from the style of Hobbes; it is a mere aggregate of arguments and concise facts, united together by deduction, as by iron bands. There are no tints, no fine or unusual word. He makes use only of words most familiar to common and lasting usage; there are not a dozen employed by him which, during two hundred years, have grown obsolete; he pierces to the root of all sensation, removes the transient and brilliant externals, compresses the solid portion which is the permanent subject-matter of all thought, and the proper object of common intelligence. He curtails throughout in order to strengthen; he attains solidity by suppression. Of all the bonds which connect ideas, he retains but one, and that the most stable; his style is only a continuous chain of the most stubborn description, wholly made up of additions and subtractions, reduced to a combination of certain simple processes, which, added on to or diminishing from one another, make up, under various names, the totals or differences, of which we are for ever either

[1] *Pepys' Diary*, iv. May 30, 1668.

studying the formation or unravelling the elements. He pursued beforehand the method of Condillac, beginning with tracing to the original fact, palpably and clearly, so as to pursue step by step the descent and parentage of the ideas of which this primary fact is the stock, in such a manner that the reader, conducted from total to total, may at any moment test the exactness of his operation, and verify the truth of his results. Such a logical system cuts across the grain of prejudice with a mechanical stiffness and boldness. Hobbes clears science of scholastic words and theories. He laughs down quiddities, he does away with rational and intelligible classifications, he rejects the authority of references.[1] He cuts, as with a surgeon's knife, at the heart of the most living creeds. He denies the authenticity of the books of Moses, Joshua, and the like. He declares that no argument proves the divinity of Scripture, and that, in order to believe it, every man requires a supernatural and personal revelation. He upsets in half-a-dozen words the authority of this and every other revelation.[2] He reduces man to a mere body, the soul to a function, God to an unknown existence. His phrases read like equations or mathematical results. In fact, it is from mathematics[3] that he derives the idea of all science. He would reconstitute moral science on the same basis. He assigns to it this foundation when he lays down that sensation is an internal movement caused by an external shock; desire, an internal movement toward an external object; and he builds upon these two notions the whole system of morals. Again, he assigns to morals a mathematical method, when he distinguishes, like the geometrician, between two simple ideas, which he transforms by degrees into two more complex; and when on the basis of sensation and desire he constructs the passions, the rights and institutions of man, just as the geometrician out of straight lines and curves constructs all the varieties of figure. To morals he gives a mathematical aspect, by mapping out the incomplete and rigid construction of human life, like the network of imaginary forms which geometricians have conceived. For the first time there was discernible in him, as well as in Descartes, but exaggerated and standing out more conspicuously, that species of intellect which produced the classic age in Europe: not

[1] If we would pay respect to antiquity, the present age is the most ancient.

[2] 'To say he hath spoken to him in a dream, is no more than to say he dreamed that God spoke to him. To say he hath seen a vision or heard a voice, is to say that he has dreamed between sleeping and waking. To say he speaks by supernatural inspiration, is to say he finds an ardent desire to speak, or some strong opinion of himself for which he cannot allege any sufficient and natural reason.'

[3] 'From the principal parts of nature, reason, and passion, have proceeded two kinds of learning, mathematical and dogmatical. The former is free from controversy and dispute, because it consisteth in comparing figure and motion only, in which things truth and the interest of men oppose not each other. But in the other there is nothing undisputable, because it compares men, and meddles with their right and profit.'

the independence of inspiration and genius which marked the Renaissance; not the mature experimental methods and conceptions combined which distinguish the present age, but the independence of argumentative reasoning, which, dispensing with the imagination, liberating itself from tradition, badly practising experience, acknowledges its queen in logic, its model in mathematics, its instrument in ratiocination, its audience in polished society, its employment in average truth, its subject-matter in abstract humanity, its formula in ideology, and in the French Revolution at once its glory and its condemnation, its triumph and its end.

But whereas Descartes, in the midst of a purified society and religion, noble and calm, enthroned intelligence and elevated man, Hobbes, in the midst of an overthrown society and a religion run mad, degraded man and enthroned matter. Through disgust of Puritanism, the courtiers reduced human existence to an animal licentiousness; through disgust of Puritanism, Hobbes reduced human nature to its merely animal aspect. The courtiers were practically atheists and brutish, as he was atheistic and brutish in the province of speculation. They had established the fashion of instinct and egotism; he wrote the philosophy of egotism and instinct. They had wiped out from their hearts all refined and noble sentiments; he wiped out from the heart all noble and refined sentiment. He arranged their manners into a theory, gave them the manual of their conduct, wrote down beforehand[1] the maxims which they were to reduce to practice. With him, as with them, 'the greatest good is the preservation of life and limb; the greatest evil is death, especially with pain.' The other goods and the other evils are only the parts of these. None seek or wish for anything but that which is pleasurable. 'No man gives except for a personal advantage.' Why are friendships good things? 'Because they are useful; friends serve for defence and otherwise.' Why do we pity one another? 'Because we imagine that a similar misfortune may befall ourselves.' Why is it noble to pardon him who asks it? 'Because thus one proves confidence in self.' Such is the background of the human heart. Consider now what becomes of the most precious flowers in these blighting hands. 'Music, painting, poetry are agreeable as imitations which recall the past, because if the past was good, it is agreeable in its imitation as a good thing; but if it was bad, it is agreeable in its imitation as being past.' To this gross mechanism he reduces the fine arts; it was perceptible in his attempt to translate the *Iliad*. In his sight, philosophy is a thing of like kind. 'Wisdom is serviceable, because it has in it some kind of protection; if it is desirable in itself, it is therefore pleasant.' Thus there is no dignity in science. It is a pastime or an assistance; good, as a servant or a puppet is a good thing. Money, being more serviceable, is worth more. 'Not he who is wise is rich, as

[1] His chief works were written between 1646 and 1655.

the Stoics say; but, on the contrary, he who is rich is wise.' As to religion, it is but 'the fear of an invisible power, whether this be a figment, or adopted from history by general consent.' Indeed, this was true for a Rochester or a Charles II.; cowards or bullies, superstitious or blasphemers, they conceived of nothing beyond. Neither is there any natural right. 'Before men were bound by contract one with another, each had the right to do what he would against whom he would.' Nor any natural friendship. 'All association is for the cause of advantage or of glory, that is, for love of one's self, not of one's associates. The origin of great and durable associations is not mutual well-wishing, but mutual fear. The desire of injuring is innate in all. . . . Warfare was the natural condition of men before societies were formed; and this not incidentally, but of all against all: and this war is of its own nature eternal.' Sectarian violence let loose the conflict of ambitions; the fall of governments, the overflow of soured imaginations and malevolent passions, had raised up this idea of society and of mankind. One and all, philosophers and people, yearned for monarchy and repose. Hobbes, the inexorable logician, would have had it absolute; repression would have been more stern, peace more lasting. The sovereign should be unopposed. Whatsoever he might do against a subject, under whatever pretext, would not be injustice. He ought to decide upon the canonical books. He was pope, and more than pope. Were he to command it, his subjects should renounce Christ, at least with their mouth; the original contract has given up to him, without any reservation, all responsibility of external actions; at least, according to this view, the sectarian will no longer have the pretext of his conscience in harassing the state. To such extremities had the intense weariness and horrors of civil war driven a narrow but logical intellect. Upon the secure den in which he had with every effort imprisoned and confined the evil beast of prey, he laid as a final weight, in order that he might perpetuate the captivity of humanity, the whole philosophy and theory not simply of man, but of the remainder of the universe. He reduced judgment to the 'combination of two terms,' ideas to conditions of the brain, sensations to motions of the body, general laws to simple words, all substance to corporeality, all science to the knowledge of sensible bodies, the human being to a body capable of motion given or received; so that man, recognising himself only under this despised form, and degraded in his conception of himself and of the world, might bow beneath the burden of a necessary authority, and submit in the end to the yoke which his rebellious nature rejects, yet is forced to undergo. Such, in brief, is the aim which this spectacle of the English Restoration suggests. Men deserved then this treatment, because they gave birth to this philosophy; they were represented on the stage as they had proved themselves to be in theory and in manners.

VI.

When the theatres, which Parliament had closed, were re-opened, the change of public taste was soon manifested. Shirley, the last of the grand old school, wrote and lived no longer. Waller, Buckingham, and Dryden were compelled to dish up the plays of Shakspeare and Fletcher and Beaumont, and to adapt them to the modern style. Pepys, who went to see *Midsummer Night's Dream*, declared that he would never go there again; 'for it is the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life.'[1] The comedy was transformed; the fact was, that the public was transformed.

What an audience was that of Shakspeare and Fletcher! What youthful and pleasing souls! In this evil-smelling room in which it was necessary to burn juniper, before that miserable half-lighted stage, before decorations worthy of an alehouse, with men playing the women's parts, illusion enchained them. They scarcely troubled themselves about probabilities; they could be carried in an instant over forest and ocean, from clime to clime, across twenty years of time, through ten battles and all the hurry of adventure. They did not care to be always laughing; comedy, after a burst of buffoonery, resumed its serious or tender tone. They came less to be amused than to muse. In these youthful minds, amidst a woof of passions and dreams, there were dark passions and brilliant dreams whose imprisoned swarm buzzed indistinctly, waiting for the poet to come and lay bare to them the novelty and the splendour of heaven. The green fields revealed by a lightning flash, the gray mane of a long and overhanging billow, a wet forest nook where the deer raise their frightened heads, the sudden smile and purpling cheek of a young girl in love, the sublime and various flight of all delicate sentiments, a cloak of ecstatic and romantic passion over all,—these were the sights and feelings which they came to seek. They raised themselves without any assistance to the summit of the world of ideas; they desired to contemplate extreme generosity, absolute love; they were not astonished at the sight of fairy-land; they entered without an effort into the region of poetical transformation, whose light was necessary to their eyes. They took in at a glance its excess and its caprices; they needed no preparation; they followed its digressions, its whimsicalities, the crowding of its abundant creations, the sudden prodigality of its high colouring, as a musician follows a symphony. They were in that transient and strained condition in which the imagination, adult and pure, laden with desire, curiosity, force, develops man all at once, and in that man the most exalted and exquisite feelings.

The roisterers took the place of these. They were rich, they had tried to invest themselves with the polish of Frenchmen; they added to the stage moveable decorations, music, lights, probability, comfort,

[1] *Pepys' Diary*, ii. Sept. 29, 1662.

every external aid; but they wanted the heart. Imagine those foppish and half-intoxicated men, who saw in love nothing beyond desire, and in man nothing beyond sensuality; Rochester in the place of Mercutio. What part of his soul could comprehend poesy and fancy? Romantic poetry was altogether beyond his reach; he could only seize the actual world, and of this world but the palpable and gross externals. Give him an exact picture of ordinary life, commonplace and probable occurrences, literal imitations of what he himself is and does; lay the scene in London, in the current year; copy his coarse words, his brutal jokes, his conversation with the orange girls, his rendezvous in the park, his attempts at French dissertation. Let him recognise himself, let him find again the people and the manners he has just left behind him in the tavern or the ante-chamber; let the theatre and the street reproduce one another. Comedy will give him the same entertainment as real life; he will wallow equally well there in vulgarity and lewdness; to be present there will demand neither imagination nor wit; eyes and memory are the only requisites. This exact imitation will amuse him and instruct him at the same time. Filthy words will make him laugh through sympathy; shameless scenes will divert him by appealing to his recollections. The author, too, will take care to arouse him by his plot, which generally has the deceiving of a father or a husband for its subject. The fine gentlemen agree with the author in siding with the gallant; they follow his fortunes with interest, and fancy that they themselves have the same success with the fair. Add to this, women debauched, and willing to be debauched; and it is manifest how these provocations, these manners of prostitutes, that interchange of exchanges and surprises, that carnival of rendezvous and suppers, the impudence of the scenes only stopping short of physical demonstration, those songs with their double meaning, those indecent speeches and repartees which accompanied the *tableaux vivants*, all that stage imitation of orgie, must have stirred up the innermost feelings of the habitual practisers of intrigue. And what is more, the theatre gave its sanction to their manners. By representing nothing but vice, it authorised their vices. Authors laid it down as a rule, that all women were impudent hussies, and that all men were brutes. Debauchery in their hands became a matter of course, nay more, a matter of good taste; they teach it. Rochester and Charles II. could quit the theatre edified in their hearts; more convinced than ever that virtue was only a pretence, the pretence of clever rascals who wanted to sell themselves dear.

VII.

Dryden, who was amongst the first[1] to adopt this view of the matter, did not adopt it heartily. A kind of hazy mist, the relic of the former age, still floated over his plays. His wealthy imagination half

[1] His *Wild Gallant* dates from 1662.

bound him to the comedy of romance. At one time he adapted Milton's *Paradise*, Shakspeare's *Tempest*, and *Troïlus and Cressida*. Another time he imitated, in *Love in a Nunnery*, in *Marriage à la Mode*, in *The Mock Astrologer*, the imbroglios and surprises of the Spanish stage. Sometimes he displays the sparkling images and lofty metaphors of the older national poets, sometimes the affected phraseology and cavilling wit of Calderon and Lope de Vega. He mingles the tragic and the humorous, the overthrow of thrones and the ordinary description of manners. But in this awkward compromise the poetic spirit of ancient comedy disappears; only the dress and the gilding remain. The new characters are gross and vicious, with the instincts of a lackey under the externals of a lord; which is the more shocking, because by it Dryden contradicts his own talents, being at bottom grave and a poet; he follows the fashion, and not his own mind; he plays the libertine with deliberate forethought, to adapt himself to the taste of the day.[1] He plays the blackguard awkwardly and dogmatically; he is impious without enthusiasm, and in measured periods. One of his gallants cries:

> 'Is not love love without a priest and altars?
> The temples are inanimate, and know not
> What vows are made in them; the priest stands ready
> For his hire, and cares not what hearts he couples;
> Love alone is marriage.'[2]

Hippolita says, 'I wished the ball might be kept perpetually in our cloister, and that half the handsome nuns in it might be turned to men, for the sake of the other.'[3] Dryden has no tact or contrivance. In his *Spanish Friar*, the queen, a good enough woman, tells Torrismond that she is going to have the old dethroned king put to death, in order to marry him, Torrismond, more at her ease. Presently she is informed that the murder is completed. 'Now,' says she, 'let us marry; this night, this happy night, is yours and mine.'[4] Side by side with sensual tragedy, a comic intrigue, pushed to the most indecent familiarity, exhibits the love of a cavalier for a married woman, who in the end

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[1] 'We love to get our mistresses, and purr over them, as cats do over mice, and let them get a little way; and all the pleasure is to pat them back again.'—*Mock Astrologer*, ii. 1.

Wildblood says to his mistress: 'I am none of those unreasonable lovers that propose to themselves the loving to eternity. A month is commonly my stint.' And Jacintha replies: 'Or would not a fortnight serve our turn?'—*Mock Astrologer*, ii. 1.

Frequently one would think Dryden was translating Hobbes, by the harshness of his jests.

[2] *Love in a Nunnery*, ii. 3. [3] *Ibid.* iii. 3.

[4] *Spanish Friar*, iii. 3. And jumbled up with the plot we keep meeting with political allusions. This marks the time. Torrismond, to excuse himself from marrying the queen, says, 'Power which in one age is tyranny is ripen'd in the next to true succession. She's in possession.'—*Spanish Friar*, iv. 2.

turns out to be his sister. Dryden discovers nothing in this situation to shock him. He has lost the commonest repugnances of natural modesty. Translating any pretty broad play, *Amphitryon* for instance, he finds it too pure; he strips off all its small delicacies, and enlarges its very improprieties.[1] Thus Jupiter says:

> 'Kings and priest are in a manner bound,
> For reverence sake, to be close hypocrites.'[2]

And he proceeds thereupon boldly to lay bare his own despotism. At bottom, his sophisms and his shamelessness serve Dryden as a means of decrying by rebound the arbitrary Divinity of the theologians:

> 'Fate is what I,
> By virtue of omnipotence, have made it;
> And power omnipotent can do no wrong!
> Not to myself, because I will it so;
> Nor yet to men, for what they are is mine.—
> This night I will enjoy Amphitryon's wife;
> For when I made her, I decreed her such
> As I should please to love.'[3]

This open pedantry is changed into open lust as soon as he sees Alcmena. No detail is omitted: Jupiter speaks his whole mind to her, and before the maids; and next morning, when he is going away, she outdoes him: she hangs on to him, and indulges in the most familiar details. All the noble externals of high gallantry are torn off like a troublesome garment; it is a cynical recklessness in place of an aristocratic decency; the scene is written after the example of Charles II. and Castlemaine,[4] not of Louis XIV. and Mme. de Montespan.

VIII.

I pass over several writers: Crowne, author of *Sir Courtly Nice;* Shadwell, an imitator of Ben Jonson; Mrs. Aphra Behn, who calls herself Astræa, a spy and a courtesan, paid by government and the public. Etheredge is the first to set the example of imitative comedy in his

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[1] Plautus' *Amphitryon* has been imitated by Dryden and Molière. Sir Walter Scott, in the introduction to Dryden's play, says: 'He is, in general, coarse and vulgar, where Molière is witty; and where the Frenchman ventures upon a double meaning, the Englishman always contrives to make it a single one.'—TR.

[2] *Amphitryon*, i. 1. [3] *Ibid.*

[4] As Jupiter is departing, on the plea of daylight, Alcmena says to him:

> 'But you and I will draw our curtains close,
> Extinguish daylight, and put out the sun.
> Come back, my lord. . . .
> You have not yet laid long enough in bed
> To warm your widowed side.'—Act ii. 2.

Compare Plautus' Roman matron and Molière's honest Frenchwoman with this expansive personage.

Man of Fashion, and to depict only the manners of his age; for the rest he is an open roisterer, and frankly describes his habits:

> 'From hunting whores, and haunting play,
> And minding nothing all the day,
> And all the night too, you will say.' . . .

Such were his pursuits in London; and further on, in a letter from Ratisbon to Lord Middleton,

> 'He makes grave legs in formal fetters,
> Converses with fools and writes dull letters;'

and gets small consolation out of the German ladies. In this grave mood Etheredge undertook the duties of an ambassador. One day, having dined too freely, he fell from the top of a staircase, and broke his neck; a loss of no great importance. But the hero of this society was William Wycherley, the coarsest writer who has polluted the stage. Being sent to France during the Revolution, he there became a Roman Catholic; then on his return abjured; then in the end, as Pope tells us, abjured again. Robbed of their Protestant ballast, these shallow brains ran from dogma to dogma, from superstition to incredulity or indifference, to end in a state of fear. He had learnt of M. de Montausier[1] the art of wearing gloves and a peruke, which sufficed in those days to make a gentleman. This merit, and the success of a filthy piece, *Love in a Wood*, drew upon him the eyes of the Duchess of Cleveland, mistress of the king and of anybody. This woman, who used to have amours with a rope-dancer, picked him up one day in the very midst of the Ring. She put her head out of her carriage-window, and cried to him before all, 'Sir, you are a rascal, a villain, the son of a ——.' Touched by this compliment, he accepted her favours, and in consequence obtained those of the king. He lost them, married a woman of bad temper, ruined himself, remained seven years in prison, passed the remainder of his life in pecuniary difficulties, regretting his youth, losing his memory, scribbling bad verses, which he got Pope to correct, pestering him with his pride and self-esteem, stringing together dull obscenities, dragging his spent body and enervated brain through the stages of misanthropy and libertinage, playing the miserable part of a toothless roisterer and a white-haired blackguard. Eleven days before his death he married a young girl, who turned out to be a strumpet. He ended as he had begun, by unskilfulness and misconduct, having succeeded neither in becoming happy nor honest, having used his vigorous intelligence and real talent only to his own injury and the injury of others.

The reason was, that Wycherley was not an epicurean born. His nature, genuinely English, that is to say, energetic and sombre, rebelled

[1] Himself a Huguenot, who had become a Roman Catholic, and the husband of Julie d'Angennes, for whom the French poets composed the celebrated *Guirlande*. —TR.

against the easy and amiable carelessness which enables one to take life as a pleasure-party. His style is laboured, and troublesome to read. His tone is virulent and bitter. He frequently forces his comedy in order to get at spiteful satire. Effort and animosity mark all that he says or puts into the mouths of others. It is Hobbes, not meditative and calm, but active and angry, who sees in man nothing but vice, yet feels himself man to the very core. The only fault he rejects is hypocrisy; the only virtue he preaches is frankness. He wants others to confess their vice, and he begins by confessing his own.

'Though I cannot lie like them (the poets), I am as vain as they; I cannot but publicly give your Grace my humble acknowledgments. . . . This is the poet's gratitude, which in plain English is only pride and ambition.'[1]

We find in him no poetry of expression, no glimpse of the ideal, no system of morality which could console, raise, or purify men. He shuts them up in their waywardness and uncleanness, and settles himself along with them. He shows them the filth of the shoals in which he confines them; he expects them to breathe this atmosphere; he plunges them into it, not to disgust them with it as by an accidental fall, but to accustom them to it as if it were their natural element. He tears down the partitions and decorations by which they endeavour to conceal their state, or regulate their disorder. He takes pleasure in making them fight, he delights in the hubbub of their unfettered instincts; he loves the violent ragings of the human mass, the confusion of their crimes, the rawness of their bruises. He strips their lusts, sets them forth at full length, feels them in their rebound; and whilst he condemns them as nauseous, he relishes them. People take what pleasure they can get: the drunkards in the suburbs, if asked how they can relish their miserable liquor, will tell you it makes them drunk as soon as better stuff, and that is the only pleasure they have.

I can understand that an author may dare much in a novel. It is a psychological study, akin to criticism or history, having almost equal licence, because it contributes almost equally to explain the anatomy of the heart. It is quite necessary to expose moral diseases, especially when this is done to add to science, coldly, accurately, and in the fashion of a dissection. Such a book is by its nature abstruse; must be read in the study, by lamp-light. But transport it to the stage, exaggerate the bed-room liberties, give them additional life by a few disreputable scenes, bestow bodily vigour upon them by the energetic action and words of the actresses; let the eyes and the senses be filled with them, not the eyes of an individual spectator, but of a thousand men and women mingled together in the pit, excited by the interest of the story, by the correctness of the literal imitation, by the glitter of

[1] *The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar*, ed. Leigh Hunt, 1840. Dedication of *Love in a Wood* to her Grace the Duchess of Cleveland.

the lights, by the noise of applause, by the contagion of impressions which run like a shudder across excited and stretched nerves. That was the spectacle which Wycherley furnished, and which the court appreciated. Is it possible that a public, and a select public, could come and listen to such scenes? In *Love in a Wood*, amidst the complications of nocturnal rendezvous, and violations effected or begun, we meet with a witling, named Dapperwit, who desires to sell his mistress Lucy to a fine gentleman of that age, Ranger. With what minuteness he bepraises her! He knocks at her door; the intended purchaser meantime, growing impatient, is treating him like a slave. The mother comes in, but wishing to sell Lucy on her own part and for her own profit, scolds them and packs them off. Next appears an old puritanical usurer and hypocrite, named Gripe, who at first will not bargain:—

'*Mrs. Joyner.* You must send for something to entertain her with. . . . Upon my life a groat! what will this purchase?

Gripe. Two black pots of ale and a cake, at the cellar.—Come, the wine has arsenic in't. . . .

Mrs. J. A treat of a groat! I will not wag.

G. Why don't you go? Here, take more money, and fetch what you will; take here, half-a-crown.

Mrs. J. What will half-a-crown do?

G. Take a crown then, an angel, a piece;—begone!

Mrs. J. A treat only will not serve my turn; I must buy the poor wretch there some toys.

G. What toys? what? speak quickly.

Mrs. J. Pendants, necklaces, fans, ribbons, points, laces, stockings, gloves. . . .

G. But here, take half a piece for the other things.

Mrs. J. Half a piece!—

G. Prithee, begone!—take t'other piece then—two pieces—three pieces—five! here; 'tis all I have.

Mrs. J. I must have the broad-seal ring too, or I stir not.'[1]

She goes away at last, having extorted all, and Lucy plays the innocent, seems to think that Gripe is a dancing-master, and asks for a lesson. What scenes, what double meanings! At last she calls out, her mother, Mrs Crossbite, breaks open the door, and enters with men placed there beforehand; Gripe is caught in the trap; they threaten to call in the constable, they swindle him out of five hundred pounds. Need I recount the plot of the *Country Wife*? It is useless to wish to skim the subject only; one sinks deeper and deeper. Horner, a man returned from France, spreads the report that he is no longer able to trouble the peace of husbands. You may imagine what becomes of such a subject in Wycherley's hands, and he draws from it all that it contains. Women converse about Horner's condition, even before him; they suffer themselves to be undeceived, and boast of it. Three of them come to him and hold a feast, drink, sing—such songs! The excess of orgie triumphs,

[1] Act iii. 3.

adjudges itself the crown, sets itself forth in maxims. 'Our virtue,' says one of them, 'is like the statesman's religion, the quaker's word, the gamester's oath, and the great man's honour; but to cheat those that trust us.'[1] In the last scene, the suspicions which had been aroused are set at rest by a new declaration of Horner. All the marriages are polluted, and the carnival ends by a dance of deceived husbands. To crown all, Horner recommends his example to the public, and the actress who comes on to recite the epilogue, completes the shamefulness of the piece, by warning gallants that they must look what they are doing; for that if they can deceive men, 'we women—there's no cozening us.'[2]

But the special and most extraordinary sign of the times is, that amid all these provocatives, no repellent circumstance is omitted, and that the narrator seems to aim as much at disgusting as at depraving us.[3] The fine gentlemen, even the ladies, introduce into their conversation the ways and means by which, since the sixteenth century, love has endeavoured to adorn itself. Dapperwit, when making an offer of Lucy, says, in order to account for the delay:

'Pish! give her but leave to . . . put on . . . the long patch under the left eye; awaken the roses on her cheeks with some Spanish wool, and warrant her breath with some lemon-peel.'[4]

Lady Flippant, alone in the park, cries out:

'Unfortunate lady that I am! I have left the herd on purpose to be chased, and have wandered this hour here; but the park affords not so much as a satyr for me; and no Burgundy man or drunken scourer will reel my way. The rag-women and cinder-women have better luck than I.'[5]

If these are the sweetest morsels, judge of the rest! Wycherley makes it his business to revolt even the senses; the nose, the eyes, everything suffers in his plays; the audience must have had the stomach of a sailor. And from this abyss English literature has ascended to the severity of morality, the excessive decency which it now possesses! This stage is a declared war against beauty and delicacy of every kind. If Wycherley borrows a character anywhere, it is only to do it violence, or degrade it to the level of his own characters. If he imitates the

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[1] *The Country Wife*, v. 4.

[2] Read the epilogue, and see what words and details authors dared then to put in the mouths of actresses.

[3] 'That spark, who has his fruitless designs upon the bed-ridden rich widow, down to the sucking heiress in her . . . clout.'—*Love in a Wood*, i. 2.

Mrs. Flippant: 'Though I had married the fool, I thought to have reserved the wit as well as other ladies.'—*Ibid.*

Dapperwit: 'I will contest with no rival, not with my old rival your coachman.'—*Ibid.*

'She has a complexion like a Holland cheese, and no more teeth left, than such as give a haut goût to her breath.'—*Ibid.* ii. 1.

[4] *The Country Wife*, iii. 2.

[5] *Ibid.* v. 2.

Agnes of Molière,[1] as he does in the *Country Wife*, he marries her in order to profane marriage, deprives her of honour, still more of shame, still more of grace, and changes her artless tenderness into shameless instincts and scandalous confessions. If he takes Shakspeare's Viola, as in the *Plain Dealer*, it is to drag her through the vileness of infamy, amidst brutalities and surprises. If he translates the part of Célimène, he wipes out at one stroke the manners of a great lady, the woman's delicacy, the tact of the lady of the house, the politeness, the refined air, the superiority of wit and knowledge of the world, in order to substitute the impudence and cheats of a foul-mouthed courtesan. If he invents an almost innocent girl, Hippolita,[2] he begins by putting into her mouth words that will not bear transcribing. Whatever he does or says, whether he copies or originates, blames or praises, his stage is a defamation of mankind, which repels even when it attracts, and which sickens one while it corrupts.

A certain gift hovers over all—namely, vigour—which is never absent in England, and gives a peculiar character to their virtues as to their vices. When we have removed the oratorical and heavily constructed phrases in the French manner, we get at the genuine English talent—a deep sympathy with nature and life. Wycherley had that lucid and vigorous perspicacity which in any particular situation seizes upon gesture, physical expression, evident detail, which pierces to the depths of the crude and base, which hits off, not men in general, and passion as it ought to be, but an individual man, and passion as it is. He is a realist, not of set purpose, as the realists of our day, but naturally. In a violent manner he lays on his plaster over the grinning and pimpled faces of his rascals, in order to bring under our very eyes the stern mask to which the living imprint of their ugliness has clung in a fleeting manner. He crams his plays with incident, he multiplies action, he pushes comedy to the verge of dramatic effect; he hustles his characters amidst surprises and violence, and all but stultifies them in order to exaggerate his satire. Observe in Olivia, a copy of Célimène, the fury of the passions which he depicts. She paints her friends as does Célimène, but with what insults! Novel, a coxcomb, says:

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[1] The letter of Agnes, in Molière's *l'École des Femmes*, iii. 4, begins thus: 'Je veux vous écrire, et je suis bien en peine par où je m'y prendrai. J'ai des pensées que je désirerais que vous sussiez; mais je ne sais comment faire pour vous les dire, et je me défie de mes paroles,' etc. Observe how Wycherley translates it: 'Dear, sweet Mr. Horner, my husband would have me send you a base, rude, unmannerly letter; but I won't—and would have me forbid you loving me; but I won't—and would have me say to you, I hate you, poor Mr. Horner; but I won't tell a lie for him—for I'm sure if you and I were in the country at cards together, I could not help treading on your toe under the table, or rubbing knees with you, and staring in your face, till you saw me, and then looking down, and blushing for an hour together,' etc.—*Country Wife*, iv. 2.

[2] In the *Gentleman Dancing-Master*.

'But, as I was saying, madam, I have been treated to-day with all the ceremony and kindness imaginable at my lady Autumn's. But the nauseous old woman at the upper hand of her table' . . . Olivia: 'Revives the old Grecian custom, of serving in a death's head with their banquets. . . . I detest her hollow cherry cheeks: she looks like an old coach new painted. . . . She is still most splendidly, gallantly ugly, and looks like an ill piece of daubing in a rich frame.'[1] The scene is borrowed from Molière's *Misanthrope* and the *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes;* but how transformed! Our modern nerves would not endure the portrait Olivia draws of Manly, her lover; he hears her unawares; she forthwith stands before him, laughs at him to his face, declares herself to be married; tells him she means to keep the diamonds which he has given her, and defies him. Fidelia says to her:

'But, madam, what could make you dissemble love to him, when 'twas so hard a thing for you; and flatter his love to you?' *Olivia.* 'That which makes all the world flatter and dissemble, 'twas his money: I had a real passion for that. . . . As soon as I had his money, I hastened his departure like a wife, who when she has made the most of a dying husband's breath, pulls away his pillow.'[2]

The last phrase is rather that of a morose satirist than an accurate observer. The woman's impudence is like a professed courtesan's. In love at first sight with Fidelia, whom she takes for a young man, she hangs upon her neck, 'stuffs her with kisses,' gropes about in the dark, crying, 'Where are thy lips?' There is a kind of animal ferocity in her love. She sends her husband off by an improvised comedy; then skipping about like a dancing girl, cries out:

'Go husband, and come up, friend: just the buckets in the well; the absence of one brings the other.' 'But I hope, like them too, they will not meet in the way, jostle, and clash together.'[3]

Surprised in *flagrante delicto*, and having confessed all to her cousin, as soon as she sees a chance of safety, she swallows her avowal with the effrontery of an actress:—

'*Eliza.* Well, cousin, this, I confess, was reasonable hypocrisy; you were the better for 't.

Olivia. What hypocrisy?

E. Why, this last deceit of your husband was lawful, since in your own defence.

O. What deceit? I'd have you know I never deceived my husband.

E. You do not understand me, sure; I say, this was an honest come-off, and a good one. But 'twas a sign your gallant had had enough of your conversation, since he could so dexterously cheat your husband in passing for a woman.

O. What d'ye mean, once more, with my gallant, and passing for a woman?

E. What do you mean? you see your husband took him for a woman!

O. Whom?

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[1] *The Plain Dealer*, ii. 1. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 2. [3] *Ibid.*

E. Heyday! why, the man he found you with. . . .

O. Lord, you rave sure!

E. Why, did you not tell me last night. . . . Fy, this fooling is so insipid, 'tis offensive.

O. And fooling with my honour will be more offensive. . . .

E. O admirable confidence! . . .

O. Confidence, to me! to me such language! nay, then I'll never see your face again. . . . Lettice, where are you? Let us begone from this censorious ill woman. . . .

E. One word first, pray, madam; can you swear that whom your husband found you with . . .

O. Swear! ay, that whosoever 'twas that stole up, unknown, into my room, when 'twas dark, I know not, whether man or woman, by heavens, by all that's good; or, may I never more have joys here, or in the other world! Nay, may I eternally—

E. Be damned. So, so, you are damned enough already by your oaths. . . . Yet take this advice with you, in this plain-dealing age, to leave off forswearing yourself. . . .

O. O hideous, hideous advice! let us go out of the hearing of it. She will spoil us, Lettice.'[1]

Here is animation; and if I dared relate the boldness and the asseveration in the night scene, it would easily appear that Mme. Marneffe[2] had a sister, and Balzac a predecessor.

There is a character who shows in a concise manner Wycherley's talent and his morality, wholly formed of energy and indelicacy,—Manly, the 'plain dealer,' so manifestly the author's favourite, that his contemporaries gave him the name of his hero for a surname. Manly is copied after Alceste, and the great difference between the two heroes shows the difference between the two societies and the two countries.[3] Manly is not a courtier, but a ship-captain, with the bearing of a sailor of the time, his cloak stained with tar, and smelling of brandy,[4] ready with blows or foul oaths, calling those he came across dogs and slaves, and when they displeased him, kicking them down stairs. And he speaks in this fashion to a lord with a voice like a mastiff. Then, when the poor nobleman tries to whisper something in his ear,

'My lord, all that you have made me know by your whispering which I knew not before, is that you have a stinking breath; there's a secret for your secret.'

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[1] *The Plain Dealer*, v. 1.

[2] See note 2, p. 256.

[3] Compare with the sayings of Alceste, in Molière's *Misanthrope*, such tirades as this: 'Such as you, like common whores and pickpockets, are only dangerous to those you embrace.' And with the character of Philinte, in the same French play, such phrases as these: 'But, faith, could you think I was a friend to those I hugged, kissed, flattered, bowed to? When their backs were turned, did not I tell you they were rogues, villains, rascals, whom I despised and hated?'

[4] Olivia says: 'I shall not have again my alcove smell like a cabin, my chamber perfumed with his tarpaulin Brandenburgh; and hear vollies of brandy-sighs, enough to make a fog in one's room.'—*The Plain Dealer*, ii. 1.

When he is in Olivia's drawing-room, with 'these fluttering parrots of the town, these apes, these echoes of men,' he bawls out as if he were on his quarter-deck, 'Peace, you Bartholomew, fair buffoons!' He seizes them by the collar, and says:

'Why, you impudent, pitiful wretches, . . . you are in all things so like women, that you may think it in me a kind of cowardice to beat you. Begone, I say. . . . No chattering, baboons; instantly begone, or' . . .

Then he turns them out of the room. These are the manners of a plain-dealing man. He has been ruined by Olivia, whom he loves, and who dismisses him. Poor Fidelia, disguised as a man, and whom he takes for a timid youth, comes and finds him while he is venting his anger:

'*F.* I warrant you, sir; for, at worst, I could beg or steal for you.
M. Nay, more bragging! . . . You said you'd beg for me.
F. I did, sir.
M. Then you shall beg for me.
F. With all my heart, sir.
M. That is, pimp for me.
F. How, sir?
M. D'ye start? . . . No more dissembling: here, (I say,) you must go use it for me to Olivia. . . . Go, flatter, lie, kneel, promise, anything to get her for me: I cannot live unless I have her.'[1]

And when Fidelia returns to him, saying that Olivia has embraced him, by force, with an abandonment of love, he exclaims:

'Her love!—a whore's, a witch's love!—But what, did she not kiss well, sir? I'm sure, I thought her lips—but I must not think of 'em more—but yet they are such I could still kiss,—grow to,—and then tear off with my teeth, grind 'em into mammocks, and spit 'em into her cuckold's face.'[2]

These savage words indicate savage actions. He goes by night to enter Olivia's house with Fidelia, and under her name; and Fidelia tries to prevent him, through jealousy. Then his blood boils, a storm of fury mounts to his face, and he speaks to her in a whispering, hissing voice:

'What, you are my rival, then! and therefore you shall stay, and keep the door for me, whilst I go in for you; but when I'm gone, if you dare to stir off from this very board, or breathe the least murmuring accent, I'll cut her throat first; and if you love her, you will not venture her life.—Nay, then I'll cut your throat too, and I know you love your own life at least. . . . Not a word more, lest I begin my revenge on her by killing you.'[3]

He knocks over the husband, another traitor, seizes from Olivia the casket of jewels he had given her, casts her one or two of them, saying, 'Here, madam, I never yet left my wench unpaid,' and gives this same casket to Fidelia, whom he marries. All these actions then appeared natural. Wycherley took to himself in his dedication the title of his hero, *Plain Dealer;* he fancied he had drawn the portrait of a frank,

[1] *The Plain Dealer,* iii. 1. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 1. [3] *Ibid.* iv. 2.

honest man, and praised himself for having set the public a fine example; he had only given them the model of an avowed and energetic brute. That was all that was left of manliness in this pitiable world. Wycherley deprived man of his ill-fitting French cloak, and displayed him with his framework of muscles, and in his naked shamelessness.

And in their midst, a great poet, blind, and fallen, his soul saddened by the misery of the times, thus depicted the madness of the infernal rout:

'Belial came last, than whom a spirit more lewd
Fell not from heaven, or more gross to love,
Vice for itself . . . who more oft than he
In temples and at altars, when the priest
Turns atheist, as did Eli's sons, who fill'd
With lust and violence the house of God?
In courts and palaces he also reigns,
And in luxurious cities, where the noise
Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,
And injury, and outrage: and when night
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.'[1]

2. The Worldlings.

I.

In the seventeenth century a new mode of life was inaugurated in Europe, the worldly, which soon took the lead of and shaped every other. In France especially, and in England, it appeared and gained ground, from the same causes and at the same time.

In order to people the drawing-rooms, a certain political condition is necessary; and this condition, which is the supremacy of the king in combination with a regular system of police, was established at the same period on both sides of the Channel. A regular police brings about peace among men, draws them out of their feudal independence and provincial isolation, increases and facilitates intercommunication, confidence, union, conveniences, and pleasures. The kingly supremacy calls into existence a court, the centre of intercourse, from which all favours flow, and which calls for a display of pleasure and splendour. The aristocracy thus attracted to one another, and attracted to the throne by security, curiosity, amusement, and interest, meet together, and become at once men of the world and men of the court. They are no longer, like the barons of a preceding age, standing in their lofty halls, armed and stern, possessed by the idea that they might perhaps, when they quit their palace, cut each other to pieces, and that if they fall to blows in the precincts of the court, the executioner is ready to cut off their hand and stop the bleeding with a red-hot iron; knowing, more-

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book i. *v.* 490–502.

over, that the king may probably have them beheaded to-morrow, and ready accordingly to cast themselves on their knees and break out into protestations of faithful submissiveness, but counting under their breath the number of swords that will be mustered on their side, and the trusty men who keep sentinel behind the drawbridge of their castles.[1] The rights, privileges, constraints, and attractions of feudal life have disappeared. There is no more need that the manor should be a fortress. These men can no longer experience the joy of reigning there as in a petty state. It has palled on them, and they quit it. Having no further cause to quarrel with the king, they go to him. His court is a drawing-room, most agreeable to the sight, and most serviceable to those who frequent it. Here are festivities, splendid furniture, a decked and chosen company, news and tittle-tattle; here they find pensions, titles, places for them and theirs; they receive both amusement and profit; it is all gain and all pleasure. Here they attend the levée, assist at dinners, return to the ball, sit down to play, are there when the king goes to bed. Here they cut a dash with their half-French dress, their wigs, their hats loaded with feathers, their trunk-hose, their cannions, the large rosettes on their shoes. The ladies paint and patch their faces, display robes of magnificent satin and velvet, laced up with silver and dragging behind, and above you may see their white busts, whose brilliant nakedness is extended to their shoulders and arms. They are gazed upon, saluted, approached. The king rides on horseback to Hyde Park; by his side canter the queen, and with her the two mistresses, Lady Castlemaine and Mrs. Stewart: 'the queen in a white-laced waistcoate and a crimson short pettycoate, and her hair dressed *à la négligence;* . . . Mrs. Stewart with her hat cocked and a red plume, with her sweet eye, little Roman nose, and excellent taille.'[2] Then they returned to Whitehall, 'where all the ladies walked, talking and fiddling with their hats and feathers, and changing and trying one another's by one another's heads, and laughing.'[3] In such fine company there was no lack of gallantry. Perfumed gloves, pocket mirrors, workboxes fitted up, apricot paste, essences, and other little love-tokens, came over every week from Paris. London furnished more substantial gifts, ear-rings, diamonds, brilliants, and golden guineas; the fair ones put up with these, as if they had come from a greater distance.[4] Intrigues abounded—Heaven knows how many or of what kind. Naturally, also, conversation takes a similar tone. They did not mince the adventures of Miss Warmestré the haughty, who, 'deceived apparently by a bad reckoning, took the liberty of lying-in in the midst of the court.'[5] They spoke in whispers about the attempts of Miss Hobart, or the happy misfortune of Miss Churchill, who, being very plain, but having

[1] Consult all Shakspeare's historical plays.
[2] *Pepys' Diary*, ii. July 13, 1663.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Mémoires de Grammont*, by A. Hamilton.
[5] *Ibid.* ch. ix.

the wit to fall from her horse, touched the eyes and heart of the Duke of York. The Chevalier de Grammont related to the king the history of Termes, or of Poussatin the almoner: every one leaves the dance to hear it; and when it is over, every one bursts out laughing. We perceive that this is not the world of Louis XIV., and yet it is a world; and if it has more froth, it runs with the identical current. The great object here also is selfish amusement, and to put on appearances; people strive to be men of fashion; a coat gives glory. Grammont was in despair when the roguery of his valet obliged him to wear the same suit twice over. Another courtier piques himself on his songs and his guitar-playing. 'Russell had a collection of two or three hundred quadrilles in tablature, all of which he used to dance without ever having studied them.' Jermyn was known for his success with the fair. 'A gentleman,' said Etheredge, 'ought to dress well, dance well, fence well, have a talent for love-letters, a pleasant voice in a room, to be always very amorous, sufficiently discreet, but not too constant.' These are already the court manners as they continued in France up to the time of Louis XVI. With such manners, words take the place of deeds. Life is passed in visits and conversations. The art of conversing became the chief of all; of course, to converse agreeably, to employ an hour, twenty subjects in an hour, hinting always, without going deep, in such a fashion that conversation should not be a labour, but a promenade. It was followed up by letters written in the evening, by madrigals or epigrams to be read in the morning, by drawing-room tragedies, or caricatures of society. In this manner a new literature was produced, the work and the portrait of the world, which was at once its audience and its model, which sprung from it, and ended in it.

II.

The art of conversation being then a necessity, people set themselves to acquire it. A revolution was effected in mind as well as in manners. As soon as circumstances assume new aspects, thought assumes a new form. The Renaissance is ended, the Classic Age begins, and the artist makes room for the author. Man is returned from his first voyage round the world of facts; the enthusiasm, the labour of a stirred imagination, the tumultuous sensation of new ideas, all the faculties which a first discovery calls into play, have become satiated, then depressed. The incentive is blunted, because the work is done. The strangeness, the far vistas, the unbridled originality, the all-powerful flights of genius aimed at the centre of truth through the extremes of folly, all the characteristics of the great discovery, are lost to sight. The imagination is tempered; the mind is disciplined: it retraces its steps; it walks its own domain once more with a satisfied curiosity, an acquired experience. Judgment, as it were, chews the cud and corrects itself. It finds a religion, an art, a philosophy, to reform or to form anew. It is no longer the minister of inspired intuition, but of a regular process of

decomposition. It no longer feels or looks for the generality; it handles and observes the specialty. It selects and classifies; it refines and regulates. It ceases to be the creator, and becomes the commentator. It quits the province of invention and settles down into criticism. It enters upon that magnificent and confused aggregate of dogmas and forms, in which the preceding age has gathered up indiscriminately its dreams and discoveries; it draws thence the ideas which it modifies and verifies. It arranges them in long chains of simple ratiocination, which descend link by link to the vulgar apprehension. It expresses them in exact terms, which present a graduated series, step by step, to the vulgar reasoning power. It marks out in the entire field of thought a series of compartments and a network of passages, which, excluding error and digression, lead gradually every mind to every object. It becomes at last clear, convenient, charming. And the world lends its aid; contingent circumstances finish the natural revolution; the taste becomes changed through a declivity of its own, but also through the influence of the court. When conversation becomes the chief business of life, it modifies style after its own image, and according to its peculiar needs. It repudiates digression, excessive metaphor, impassioned exclamations, all loose and overstrained ways. We cannot bawl, gesticulate, dream aloud, in a drawing-room; we restrain ourselves; we criticise and keep watch over ourselves; we pass the time in narration and discussion; we stand in need of concise expression, exact language, clear and connected reasoning; otherwise we cannot fence or comprehend each other. Correct style, good language, conversation, are self-generated, and very quickly perfected; for refinement is the aim of the man of the world: he studies to render everything more becoming and more serviceable, his chattels and his speech, his periods and his dress. Art and artifice are there the distinguishing mark. People pride themselves on being perfect in their mother tongue, never to miss the correct sense of any word, to avoid vulgar expressions, to string together their antitheses, to develop their thoughts, to employ rhetoric. Nothing is more marked than the contrast of the conversations of Shakspeare and Fletcher with those of Wycherley and Congreve. In Shakspeare the dialogue resembles an assault of arms; we could imagine men of skill fencing with words as it were in a fencing-school. They play the buffoon, sing, think aloud, burst out into a laugh, into puns, into fishwomen's talk and into poets' talk, into quaint whimsicalities; they have a taste for the ridiculous, the sparkling; one of them dances while he speaks; they would willingly walk on their hands; there is not one grain of calculation to more than three grains of folly in their heads. Here, on the other hand, the characters are steady; they reason and dispute; ratiocination is the basis of their style; they are so perfect that the thing is overdone, and we see through it all the author stringing his phrases. They arrange a tableau, multiply ingenious comparisons, balance well-ordered periods. One character delivers a satire, another serves up a

little essay on morality. We might draw from the comedies of the time a volume of sentences; they are charged with literary morsels which foreshadow the *Spectator*.[1] They hunt for clever and humorous expressions, they clothe indecent circumstances with decent words; they skip nimbly over the fragile ice of decorum, and leave their mark without breaking it. I see gentlemen, seated in gilt arm-chairs, of quiet wit and studied speech, cool in observation, eloquent sceptics, expert in the fashions, lovers of elegance, dainty of fine talk as much from vanity as from taste, who, while conversing between a compliment and a reverence, will no more neglect their good style than their neat gloves or their hat.

III.

Amongst the best and most agreeable specimens of this new refinement, appears Sir William Temple, a diplomatist and man of the world, prudent, wise, and polite, gifted with tact in conversation and in business, expert in the knowledge of the times, and in not compromising himself, adroit in pressing forward and in standing aside, who knew how to attract to himself the favour and the expectations of England, to obtain the eulogies of men of letters, of savants, of politicians, of the people, to gain a European reputation, to win all the crowns appropriated to science, patriotism, virtue, genius, without having too much of science, patriotism, genius, or virtue. Such a life is the masterpiece of that age: fine externals on a foundation not so fine; this is its abstract. His mode as an author agrees with his maxims as a politician. His principles and style are homogeneous; a genuine diplomatist, such as one meets in the drawing-rooms, having probed Europe and touched everywhere the bottom of things; tired of everything, specially of enthusiasm, admirable in an arm-chair or at a levee, a good story-teller, waggish if need were, but in moderation, accomplished in the art of maintaining the dignity of his station and of enjoying himself. In his retreat at Sheen, afterwards at Moor Park, he employs his leisure in writing; and he writes as a man of his rank would speak, very well, that is to say, with dignity and facility, particularly when he writes of the countries he has visited, of the incidents he has seen, the noble amusements which serve to pass his time.[2] He has an income of fifteen hundred a year, and a nice sinecure in Ireland. He retired from public life during momentous struggles, siding neither with the king nor against him, resolved, as he tells us himself, not to set himself against the current when the current is irresistible. He lives peacefully in the country with his wife, his sister, his secretary, his dependants, receiving the visits of strangers, who are anxious to see the negotiator

[1] Take, for example, Farquhar's *Beaux Stratagem*, ii. 1.

[2] Consult especially, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands; Of Gardening.*

of the Triple Alliance, and sometimes of the new King William, who, unable to obtain his services, comes occasionally to seek his counsel. He plants and gardens, in a fertile soil, in a country the climate of which agrees with him, amongst regular flower-beds, by the side of a very straight canal, bordered by a straight terrace; and he lauds himself in set terms, and with suitable discreetness, for the character he possesses and the part he has chosen:—

'I have often wondered how such sharp and violent invectives come to be made so generally against Epicurus, by the ages that followed him, whose admirable wit, felicity of expression, excellence of nature, sweetness of conversation, temperance of life and constancy of death, made him so beloved by his friends, admired by his scholars, and honoured by the Athenians.'[1]

He does well to defend Epicurus, because he has followed his precepts, avoiding every great disorder of the intelligence, and installing himself, like one of Lucretius' gods, in the interspace of worlds; as he says:

'Where factions were once entered and rooted in a state, they thought it madness for good men to meddle with public affairs.'

And again:

'The true service of the public is a business of so much labour and so much care, that though a good and wise man may not refuse it, if he be called to it by his Prince or his country, and thinks he may be of more than vulgar use, yet he will seldom or never seek it; but leaves it commonly to men who, under the disguise of public good, pursue their own designs of wealth, power, and such bastard honours as usually attend them, not that which is the true, and only true, reward of virtue.'[2]

This is how he reveals himself. Thus presented to us, he goes on to talk of the gardening which he practises, and first of the six grand Epicureans who have illustrated the doctrine of their master—Cæsar, Atticus, Lucretius, Horace, Mæcenas, Virgil; then of the various sorts of gardens which have a name in the world, from the garden of Eden, and the garden of Alcinous, to those of Holland and Italy; and all this at some length, like a man who listens to himself and is listened to by others, who does rather profusely the honours of his house and of his wit to his guests, but does them with grace and dignity, not dogmatically nor haughtily, but in varied tones, aptly modulating his voice and gestures. He recounts the four kinds of grapes which he has introduced into England, and confesses that he has been extravagant, yet does not regret it; for five years he has not once wished to see London. He intersperses technical advice with anecdotes; whereof one relates to Charles II., who praised the English climate above all others, saying:

'He thought that was the best climate, where he could be abroad in the air with pleasure, or at least without trouble or inconvenience, the most days of the year, and the most hours of the day.'

Another about the Bishop of Munster, who, unable to grow anything

[1] Temple's Works: *Of Gardening*, ii. 190.

[2] *Ibid.* 184.

but cherries in his orchard, had collected all the varieties, and so perfected the trees that he had fruit from May to September. The reader feels an inward gratification when he hears an eyewitness relate minute details of such great men. Our attention is aroused immediately; we in consequence imagine ourselves denizens of the court, and smile complacently: no matter if the details be slender; they serve passably well, they constitute 'a half hour with the aristocracy,' like a lordly way of taking snuff, or shaking the lace of one's ruffles. Such is the interest of courtly conversation; it can be held about nothing; the excellence of the manner lends this nothing a peculiar charm; you hear the sound of the voice, you are amused by the half smile, abandon yourself to the fluent stream, forget that these are ordinary ideas; you observe the narrator, his wig, the cane he toys with, the ribbons on his shoes, his easy walk over the smooth gravel of his garden paths between the faultless hedges; the ear, the mind even is charmed, captivated by the appropriateness of his diction, by the abundance of his ornate periods, by the dignity and fulness of a style which is involuntarily regular, which, at first artificial, like good breeding, ends, like true good breeding, by being changed into a real necessity and a natural talent.

Unfortunately, this talent occasionally leads to blunders; when a man speaks well about everything, he thinks he has a right to speak of everything. He plays philosopher, critic, even man of learning; and indeed becomes so actually, at least with the ladies. Such a man writes, like Temple, *Essays on the Nature of Government*, on *Heroic Virtue*,[1] on poetry; that is, little treatises on society, on the beautiful, on the philosophy of history. He is the Locke, the Herder, the Bentley of the drawing-room, and nothing else. Now and then, doubtless, his mother wit leads him to fair original judgments. Temple was the first to discover a Pindaric glow in the old chant of Ragnar Lodbrog, and to place Don Quixote in the first rank of modern fictions; and moreover, when he handles a subject within his range, like the causes of the power and decline of the Turks, his reasoning is admirable. But otherwise, he is simply the scholar; nay, in him the pedant crops out, and the worst of pedants, who, being ignorant, wishes to seem wise, who quotes the history of every land, hauling in Jupiter, Saturn, Osiris, Fo-hi, Confucius, Manco-Capac, Mahomet, and discourses on all these obscure and unknown civilisations, as if he had laboriously studied them, on his own behalf, at their source, and not at second hand, through the extracts of his secretary, or the books of others. One day he came to grief; having plunged into a literary dispute, and claimed superiority for the ancients over the moderns, he imagined himself a Hellenist, an antiquarian, related the voyages of Pythagoras, the education of Orpheus, and remarked that the Greek sages

[1] Compare this essay with that of Carlyle, on *Heroes and Hero-Worship*; the title and subject are similar; it is curious to note the difference of the two centuries.

'were commonly excellent poets, and great physicians: they were so learned in natural philosophy, that they foretold not only eclipses in the heavens, but earthquakes at land and storms at sea, great droughts and great plagues, much plenty or much scarcity of certain sorts of fruits or grain; not to mention the magical powers attributed to several of them, to allay storms, to raise gales, to appease commotions of people, to make plagues cease.'[1]

Admirable faculties, which we no longer possess. Again he regretted the decay of music, 'by which men and beasts, fishes, fowls, and serpents, were so frequently enchanted, and their very natures changed; by which the passions of men were raised to the greatest height and violence, and then as suddenly appeased, so as they might be justly said to be turned into lions or lambs, into wolves or into harts, by the powers and charms of this admirable art.'[2] He wished to enumerate the greatest modern writers, and forgot to mention in his catalogue, 'amongst the Italians,[3] Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso; in his list of French, Pascal, Bossuet, Molière, Corneille, Racine, and Boileau; in his list of Spaniards, Lope and Calderon; and in his list of English, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton;' though, by way of compensation, he inserted the names of Paolo Sarpi, Guevara, Sir Philip Sidney, Selden, Voiture, and Bussy-Rabutin, 'author of the *Amours de Gaul*.' To cap all, he declared the fables of Æsop a dull Byzantine compilation, and the letters of Phalaris a wretched sophistical forgery, admirable and authentic:—

'It may perhaps be further affirmed, in favour of the ancients, that the oldest books we have are still in their kind the best. The two most ancient that I know of in prose, among those we call profane authors, are Æsop's *Fables* and Phalaris' *Epistles*, both living near the same time, which was that of Cyrus and Pythagoras. As the first has been agreed by all ages since for the greatest master in his kind, and all others of that sort have been but imitations of his original; so I think the *Epistles of Phalaris* to have more grace, more spirit, more force of wit and genius, than any others I have ever seen, either ancient or modern.'

And then, in order to commit himself beyond remedy, he gravely remarked:

'I know several learned men (or that usually pass for such, under the name of critics) have not esteemed them genuine, and Politian with some others have attributed them to Lucian; but I think he must have little skill in painting that cannot find out this to be an original: such diversity of passions, upon such variety of actions and passages of life and government, such freedom of thought, such boldness of expression, such bounty to his friends, such scorn of his enemies, such honour of learned men, such esteem of good, such knowledge of life, such contempt of death, with such fierceness of nature and cruelty of revenge, could never be represented but by him that possessed them; and I esteem Lucian to have been no more capable of writing than of acting what Phalaris did. In all one writ, you find the scholar or the sophist; and in all the other, the tyrant and the commander.'[4]

[1] Temple's Works, ii.: *An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, 155.
[2] *Ibid.* 165. [3] Macaulay's Works, vi. 319: *Essay on Sir William Temple.*
[4] *An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, 173.

Fine rhetoric truly; it is sad that a passage so aptly turned should cover so many stupidities. All this appeared very triumphant; and the universal applause with which this fine oratorical bombast was greeted demonstrates the taste and the culture, the hollowness and the politeness, of the elegant world of which Temple was the marvel, and which, like Temple, loved only the varnish of truth.

IV.

Such were the ornate and polished manners which gradually pierce through debauchery and assume the ascendant. Insensibly the current grows clearer, and marks out its course like a stream, which forcibly entering a new bed, moves with difficulty at first through a heap of mud, then pushes forward its still murky waters, which are purified little by little. These debauchees try to be men of the world, and sometimes succeed in it. Wycherley writes well, very clearly, without the least trace of euphuism, almost in the French manner. He makes Dapperwit say of Lucy, in measured phrase, 'She is beautiful without affectation, amorous without impertinence, . . . frolic without rudeness.'[1] When he desires it he is ingenious, and his gentlemen exchange happy comparisons. 'Mistresses,' says one, 'are like books: if you pore upon them too much, they doze you, and make you unfit for company; but if used discreetly, you are the fitter for conversation by 'em.' 'Yes,' says another, 'a mistress should be like a little country retreat near the town; not to dwell in constantly, but only for a night and away, to taste the town the better when a man returns.'[2] These folk have style, even out of place, and in spite of the situation or condition of the persons. A shoemaker in one of Etheredge's plays says: 'There is never a man in the town lives more like a gentleman with his wife than I do. I never mind her motions; she never inquires into mine. We speak to one another civilly, hate one another heartily.' There is perfect art in this little speech; everything is complete, even to the symmetrical antithesis of words, ideas, sounds: what a fine talker is this same satirical shoemaker! After a satire, a madrigal. In one place a certain character exclaims, in the very middle of a dialogue, and in sober prose, 'Pretty pouting lips, with a little moisture hanging on them, that look like the Province rose fresh on the bush, ere the morning sun has quite drawn up the dew.' Is not this the graceful gallantry of the court? Rochester himself sometimes might furnish a parallel. Two or three of his songs are still to be found in the expurgated books of extracts in use amongst modest young girls. It matters nothing that such men are really scamps; they must be every moment using compliments and salutations: before women whom they wish to seduce they are compelled to warble tender words and insipidities: they acknowledge but one check, the necessity to appear well-bred; yet this check suffices to restrain them. Rochester

[1] *Love in a Wood*, iii. 2. [2] *The Country Wife*, i. 1.

is correct even in the midst of his filth; if he talks lewdly, it is in the able and exact manner of Boileau. All these roisterers aim at being wits and men of the world. Sir Charles Sedley ruins and pollutes himself, but Charles II. calls him 'the viceroy of Apollo.' Buckingham extols 'the magic of his style.' He is the most charming, the most sought after of talkers; he makes puns and verses, always agreeable, sometimes refined; he handles dexterously the pretty jargon of mythology; he insinuates into his airy, flowing verses all the dainty and somewhat affected prettinesses of the drawing-room. He sings thus to Chloris:

'My passion with your beauty grew,
While Cupid at my heart,
Still as his mother favour'd you,
Threw a new flaming dart.'

And then sums up:

'Each gloried in their wanton part:
To make a lover, he
Employ'd the utmost of his art;
To make a beauty, she.'[1]

There is no love whatever in these pretty things; they are received as they are presented, with a smile; they form part of the conventional language, the polite attentions due from gentlemen to ladies. I suppose they would send them in the morning with a nosegay, or a box of preserved fruits. Roscommon indites some verses on a dead lapdog, on a young lady's cold; this naughty cold prevents her singing—cursed be the winter! And hereupon he takes the winter to task, abuses it at length. Here you have the literary amusements of the worldling. They first treat love, then danger, most airily and gaily. On the eve of a naval contest, Dorset, at sea, amidst the pitching of his vessel, addresses a celebrated song to the ladies. There is nothing weighty in it, either sentiment or wit; people hum the couplets as they pass; they emit a gleam of gaiety; the next moment they are forgotten. Dorset at sea writes to the ladies, on the night before an engagement:

'Let's hear of no inconstancy,
We have too much of *that* at sea.'

And again:

'Should foggy Opdam chance to know
Our sad and dismal story,
The Dutch would scorn so weak a foe,
And quit their fort at Goeree.
For what resistance can they find
From men who've left their hearts behind?'

Then come jests too much in the English style:

'Then if we write not by each post,
Think not we are unkind; . . .

[1] Sir Charles Sedley's Works, ed. Briscoe, 1778, 2 vols.: *The Mulberry Garden*, ii.

Our tears we'll send a speedier way;
The tide shall bring them twice a day.'

Such tears can hardly flow from sorrow; the lady regards them as the lover sheds them, good-naturedly. She is 'at a play' (he thinks so, and tells her so):

'Whilst you, regardless of our woe,
Sit careless at a play,
Perhaps permit some happier man
To kiss your hand, or flirt your fan.'[1]

Dorset hardly troubles himself about it, plays with poetry without excess or assiduity, with a rapid pen, writing to-day a verse against Dorinda, to-morrow a satire against Mr. Howard, always easily and without study, like a true gentleman. He is an earl, a chamberlain, and rich; he pensions and patronises poets as he would flirts—to amuse himself, without binding himself. The Duke of Buckingham does the same, and also the contrary; caresses these, parodies those; is flattered, mocked, and ends by receiving his portrait at Dryden's hands,—a *chef d'œuvre*, but not flattering. We have seen such pastimes and such bickerings in France; we find here the same manners and the same literature, because we find here also the same society and the same spirit.

Among these poets, and in the front rank, is Edmund Waller, who lived and wrote in this manner to his eighty-second year: a man of wit and fashion, well-bred, familiar from his youth with great people, endued with tact and foresight, quick at repartee, not easy to put out of countenance, but selfish, of indifferent feelings, having changed sides more than once, and bearing very well the memory of his tergiversations; in short, a good model of the worldling and the courtier. It was he who, having once praised Cromwell, and afterward Charles II., but the latter more feebly than the former, said by way of excuse: 'Poets, your Majesty, succeed better in fiction than in truth.' In this kind of existence, three-quarters of the poetry is written for the occasion; it is the small change of conversation or flattery; it resembles the little events or the little sentiments from which it sprang. One piece is written on tea, another on the queen's portrait; it is necessary to pay one's court; moreover, 'His Majesty has requested some verses.' One lady makes him a present of a silver pen, straight he throws his gratitude into rhyme; another has the power of sleeping at will, straight a sportive stanza; a false report is spread that she has just had her portrait painted, straight a copy of verses on this grave affair. A little further on there are verses to the Countess of Carlisle on her chamber, condolences to my Lord of Northumberland on the death of his wife, a pretty thing on a lady 'passing through a crowd of people,' an answer, verse for verse, to some rhymes of Sir John Suckling. He seizes anything frivolous, new, or convenient, on the wing; and his poetry is only

[1] *Works of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon, and Dorset*, 2 vols., 1731, ii. 54.

a written conversation,—I mean the conversation which goes on at a ball, when people speak for the sake of speaking, lifting a lock of one's wig, or twisting about a glove. Gallantry, as he confesses, holds the chief place here, and one may be pretty certain that the love is not over-sincere. In fact, Waller sighs on purpose (Sacharissa had a fine dowry), or at least for the sake of good manners; that which is most evident in his tender poems is, that he aims at a flowing style and good rhymes. He is affected, he exaggerates, he strains after wit, he is always an author. Not venturing to address Sacharissa herself, he addresses Mrs. Braghton, her attendant, 'his fellow-servant:'

> 'So, in those nations which the Sun adore,
> Some modest Persian, or some weak-eyed Moor,
> No higher dares advance his dazzled sight
> Than to some gilded cloud, which near the light
> Of their ascending god adorns the east,
> And, graced with his beam, outshines the rest.'[1]

A fine comparison! That is a well-made courtesy; I hope Sacharissa responds with one equally correct. His despairs bear the same flavour; he pierces the groves of Penshurst with his cries, 'reports his flame to the beeches,' and the well-bred beeches 'bow their heads, as if they felt the same.'[2] It is probable that, in these mournful walks, his greatest care was lest he should wet the soles of his high-heeled shoes. These transports of love bring in the classic machinery, Apollo and the Muses. Apollo is annoyed that one of his servants is ill-treated, and bids him depart; and he departs, telling Sacharissa that she is harder than an oak, and that she was certainly produced from a rock.[3]

There is one genuine reality in all this—sensuality; not ardent, but light and gay. There is a certain piece, *The Fall*, which an abbé of the court of Louis xv. might have written:

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[1] *The Poets of Great Britain*, ed. R. Anderson, 14 vols., 1792, v.; Waller, Epistle x. 478.

[2] *Ibid.* 452.

[3] 'While in this park I sing, the list'ning deer
Attend my passion, and forget to fear;
When to the beeches I report my flame,
They bow their heads, as if they felt the same.
To gods appealing, when I reach their bow'rs
With loud complaints, they answer me in show'rs.
To thee a wild and cruel soul is giv'n,
More deaf than trees, and prouder than the heav'n.
. . . The rock,
That cloven rock, produc'd thee. . . .
This last complaint th' indulgent ears did pierce
Of just Apollo, president of verse;
Highly concerned that the Muse should bring
Damage to one whom he had taught to sing.'—*Ibid.* p. 452.

'Then blush not, Fair! or on him frown, . . .
How could the youth, alas! but bend
When his whole Heav'n upon him lean'd;
If aught by him amiss were done,
'Twas that he let you rise so soon.'[1]

Other pieces smack of their surroundings, and are not so polished:

'Amoret! as sweet, as good,
As the most delicious food,
Which but tasted does impart
Life and gladness to the heart.'[2]

I should not be pleased, were I a woman, to be compared to a beefsteak, though that be appetising; nor should I like any more to find myself, like Sacharissa, placed on a level with good wine, which flies to the head:

'Sacharissa's beauty's wine,
Which to madness doth incline;
Such a liquor as no brain
That is mortal can sustain.'[3]

This is too much honour for port wine and meat. The English background crops up here and elsewhere; for example, the beautiful Sacharissa, having ceased to be beautiful, asked Waller if he would write again verses for her; he answered, 'Yes, madame, when you are as young and as handsome as you were formerly.' Here is something to shock a Frenchman. Nevertheless Waller is usually amiable; a sort of brilliant light floats like a halo round his verses; he is always elegant, often graceful. His gracefulness is like the perfume exhaled from the world; fresh toilettes, ornamented drawing-rooms, the abundance and all those refined and delicate comforts give to the soul a sort of sweetness which is breathed forth in obliging compliments and smiles. Waller has such, and that most flattering, apropos of a bud, a girdle, a rose. Such bouquets become his hands and his art. He pays an excellent compliment 'To young Lady Lucy Sidney' on her age. And what could be more attractive for a denizen of the drawing-rooms, than this bud of still unopened youth, but which blushes already, and is on the point of expanding?

'Yet, fairest blossom! do not slight
That age which you may know so soon.
The rosy morn resigns her light
And milder glory to the noon.'[4]

All his verses flow with a continuous harmony, clearness, facility, though his voice is never raised, or out of tune, or rough, nor loses its true accent, except by the worldling's affectation, which regularly varies all tones in order to soften them. His poetry resembles one

[1] *The Poets of Great Britain*, Waller, v. 456.
[2] *Ibid.* 479. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*

of those pretty, affected, bedizened women, busy in inclining their head on one side, and murmuring with a soft voice commonplace things which they cannot be said to think, yet agreeable in their beribboned dress, and who would please altogether if they did not dream of always pleasing.

It is not that these men cannot handle grave subjects; but they handle them in their own fashion, without gravity or depth. What the courtier most lacks is the genuine sentiment of a discovered and personal idea. That which interests him most is the correctness of the adornment, and the perfection of external form. They care little for the foundation, much for the outer shape. In fact, it is form which they take for their subject in nearly all their serious poetry; they are critics, they lay down precepts, they compose Poetic Arts. Denham, and afterwards Roscommon, teach in complete poems the art of translating poetry well. The Duke of Buckingham versified an *Essay on Poetry*, and an *Essay on Satire*. Dryden is in the first rank of these pedagogues. Like Dryden again, they turn translators, amplifiers. Roscommon translated the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, Waller the first act of *Pompée*, Denham some fragments of Homer and Virgil, and an Italian poem on *Justice and Temperance*. Rochester composed a satire against *Mankind*, in the style of Boileau, and also an epistle on *Nothing;* the amorous Waller wrote a didactic poem on *The Fear of God*, and another in six cantos on *Divine Love*. These are exercises of style. They take a theological thesis, an open question of philosophy, a poetic maxim, and develop it in jointed prose, furnished with rhymes; they discover nothing, invent nothing, feel little, and only aim at expressing good arguments in classical metaphors, in exalted terms, after a conventional model. Most of their verses consist of two nouns, furnished with epithets, and connected by a verb, like one's college Latin verses. The epithet is good: they had to hunt through the Gradus for it, or, as Boileau wills it, they had to carry the line unfinished in their heads, and had to think about it an hour in the open air, until at last, at the corner of a wood, they found the word which had escaped. I yawn, but applaud. At this price a generation ends by forming the sustained style which is necessary to support, make public, and demonstrate great things. Meanwhile, with their ornate, official diction, and their borrowed thought, they are like formal chamberlains, in embroidered coats, present at a royal marriage or an august baptism, empty of head, grave in manner, admirable for dignity and bearing, with the punctilio and the ideas of a dummy.

V.

One of them only (Dryden always excepted) rose to talent, Sir John Denham, Charles the First's secretary. He was employed in public affairs, and after a dissolute youth, turned to serious habits; and leaving behind him satiric verse and party tricks, attained in riper years a lofty oratorical style. His best poem, *Cooper's Hill*, is the description of a

hill and its surroundings, blended with the historical ideas which the sight recalls, and the moral reflections which its appearance naturally suggests. All these subjects are in accordance with the nobility and the limitation of the classical spirit, and display his vigour without betraying his weaknesses; the poet could show off his whole talent without forcing it. His fine language exhibits all its beauty, because it is sincere. We find pleasure in following the regular progress of those copious passages in which his ideas, opposed or combined, attain for the first time their definite place and full clearness, where symmetry only brings out the argument more clearly, expansion only completes thought, antithesis and repetition do not induce trifling and affectation, where the music of the verse, adding the breadth of sound to the fulness of sense, conducts the chain of ideas, without effort or disorder, by an appropriate measure to a becoming order and movement. Gratification is united with solidity; the author of *Cooper's Hill* knows how to please as well as to impress. His poem is like a king's park, dignified and level without doubt, but arranged for the pleasure of the sight, and full of choice prospects. It leads us by easy digressions across a multitude of varied thoughts. It shows us here a mountain, yonder a memorial of the nymphs, a classic memorial, like a portico filled with statues, further on a wide river-course, and by its side the ruins of an abbey; each page of the poem is like a distinct alley, with its distinct perspective. Further on, our thoughts are turned to the superstitions of the ignorant middle-ages, and to the excesses of the recent revolution; then comes the picture of a royal hunt; we see the trembling stag brought to a stand in the midst of the leaves:

> 'He calls to mind his strength, and then his speed,
> His winged heels, and then his armed head;
> With these t' avoid, with that his fate to meet;
> But fear prevails, and bids him trust his feet.
> So fast he flies, that his reviewing eye
> Has lost the chasers, and his ear the cry.'[1]

These are the worthy spectacles and the studied diversity of the grounds of a nobleman. Every object, moreover, receives here, as in a king's palace, all the adornment which can be given to it; elegant epithets are introduced to embellish a feeble substantive; the decorations of art transform the commonplace of nature: vessels are 'floating towers;' the Thames is the most loved of all the Ocean's sons; the airy mountain hides its proud head among the clouds, whilst a shady mantle clothes its sides. Among different kinds of ideas, there is one kingly, full of stately and magnificent ceremonies, of self-contained and studied gestures, of correct yet commanding figures, uniform and imposing like the appointments of a palace; hence the classic writers, and Denham amongst them, draw all their poetic tints. From this every object and

[1] *The Poets of Great Britain*, v., Denham, 675.

circumstance takes its colouring, because constrained to come into contact with it. Here the object and circumstances are compelled to traverse other things. Denham is not a mere courtier, he is an Englishman; that is, preoccupied by moral emotions. He often quits his landscape to enter into some grave reflection; politics, religion, come to disturb the enjoyment of his eyes; in reference to a hill or a forest, he meditates upon man; externals lead him inward; impressions of the senses to contemplations of the soul. The men of this race are by nature and custom esoteric. When he sees the Thames throw itself into the sea, he compares it with 'mortal life hasting to meet eternity.' The face of a mountain, beaten by storms, reminds him of 'the common fate of all that's high or great.' The course of the river suggests to him ideas of inner reformation:

> 'O could I flow like thee! and make thy stream
> My great example, as it is my theme!
> Though deep, yet clear, though gentle yet not dull;
> Strong without rage, without o'erflowing, full.
>
> But his proud head the airy mountain hides
> Among the clouds; his shoulders and his sides
> A shady mantle clothes; his curled brows
> Frown on the gentle stream, which calmly flows;
> While winds and storms his lofty forehead beat,
> The common fate of all that's high or great.'[1]

There is in the English mind an indestructible stock of moral instincts, and grand melancholy; and it is the greatest confirmation of this, that we can discover such a stock at the court of Charles II.

These are, however, but rare openings, and as it were levellings of the original rock. The habits of the worldling are as a thick layer which cover it throughout. Manners, conversation, style, the stage, taste, all is French, or tries to be; they imitate France as they are able, and go there to mould themselves. Many cavaliers went there, driven away by Cromwell. Denham, Waller, Roscommon, and Rochester resided there; the Duchess of Newcastle, a poetess of the time, was married at Paris; the Duke of Buckingham served a campaign under Turenne; Wycherley was sent to France by his father, who wished to rescue him from the contagion of Puritan opinions; Vanbrugh, one of the best comic playwrights, went thither to contract a polish. The two courts were allied almost always in fact, and always in heart, by a community of interests, and of religious and monarchical ideas. Charles II. accepted from Louis XIV. a pension, a mistress, counsels, and examples; the nobility followed their prince, and France was the model of the English court. Her literature and manners, the finest of the classic age, led the fashion. We perceive in English writings that French authors are their masters, and that they were in the hands of all well-

[1] *The Poets of Great Britain*, v., Denham, 674.

educated people. They consulted Bossuet, translated Corneille, imitated Molière, respected Boileau. It went so far, that the greatest gallants of them tried to be altogether French, to mix some scraps of French in every phrase. 'It is as ill-breeding now to speak good English,' says Wycherley, 'as to write good English, good sense, or a good hand.' These Frenchified coxcombs[1] are compliment-mongers, always powdered, perfumed, 'eminent for being bien gantés.' They affect delicacy, they are fastidious; they find the English coarse, gloomy, stiff; they try to be giddy and thoughtless; they giggle and prate at random, placing the glory of man in the perfection of his wig and his bows. The theatre, which ridicules these imitators, is an imitator after their fashion. French comedy, like French politeness, becomes their model. They copy both, altering without equalling them; for monarchical and classic France is, amongst all nations, the best fitted from its instincts and institutions for the modes of worldly life, and the works of an oratorical mind. England follows it in this course, being carried away by the universal current of the age, but at a distance, and drawn aside by its national peculiarities. It is this common direction and this particular deviation which the society and its poetry have proclaimed, and which the stage and its characters will display.

VI.

Four principal writers established this comedy—Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar:[2] the first gross, and in the first irruption of vice; the others more sedate, possessing more a taste for urbanity than debauchery; yet all men of the world, and priding themselves on their good breeding, on passing their days at court or in fine company, on having the tastes and bearing of gentlemen. 'I am not a literary man,' said Congreve to Voltaire, 'I am a gentleman.' In fact, as Pope said, he lived more like a man of quality than a man of letters, was noted for his successes with the fair, and passed his latter years in the house of the Duchess of Marlborough. I have said that Wycherley, under Charles II., was one of the most fashionable courtiers. He served in the army for some time, as did also Vanbrugh and Farquhar; nothing is more gallant than the name of Captain which they employed, the military stories they brought back, and the feather they stuck in their hats. They all wrote comedies on the same worldly and classical model, made up of probable incidents such as we observe around us every day, of well-bred characters such as we commonly meet in a drawing-room, correct and elegant conversations such as well-bred men can carry on. This theatre, wanting in poetry, fancy, and adventures, imitative and discursive, was formed at the same time as that of M , by

[1] Etheredge's *Sir Fopling Flutter*, Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-master*, i. 2.

[2] From 1672 to 1726.

the same causes, and on his model, so that in order to comprehend it we must compare it with that of Molière.

'Molière belongs to no nation,' said a great English actor (Kemble); 'one day the god of comedy, wishing to write, became a man, and happened to fall into France.' I accept this saying; but in becoming man he found himself, at the same time, a man of the seventeenth century and a Frenchman, and that is how he was the god of comedy. 'To amuse honest folk,' said Molière, 'what a strange task!' Only the French art of the seventeenth century could succeed in that; for it consists in leading by an agreeable path to general notions; and the taste for these notions, as well as the custom of treading this path, is the peculiar mark of honest folk. Molière, like Racine, expands and develops. Open any one of his plays that comes to hand, and the first scene in it, chosen at random; after three replies you are carried away, or rather led away. The second continues the first, the third carries out the second, the fourth completes all; a current is created which bears us on, which bears us away, which does not release us until it is exhausted. There is no check, no digression, no episodes to distract our attention. To prevent the lapses of an absent mind, a secondary character intervenes, a lackey, a lady's-maid, a wife, who, couplet by couplet, repeat in a different fashion the reply of the principal character, and by means of symmetry and contrast restrain us in the path laid down. Arrived at the end, a second current seizes us and acts like the first. It is composed like the other, and with regard to the other. It throws it out by contrast, or strengthens it by resemblance. Here the valets repeat the dispute, there the reconciliation of their masters. In one place, Alceste, drawn in one direction through three pages by anger, is drawn in a contrary direction, and through three pages, by love. Further on, tradesmen, professors, neighbours, domestics, relieve each other scene after scene, in order to bring out in clearer light the pretentiousness and gullibility of M. Jourdain. Every scene, every act, brings out in greater relief, completes, or prepares another. All is united, and all is simple; the action progresses, and progresses only to carry on the idea; there is no complication, no incidents. One comic event suffices for the story. A dozen conversations make up the play of the *Misanthrope*. The same situation, five or six times renewed, is the whole of *l'Ecole des Femmes*. These pieces are made out of nothing. They have no need of incidents, they find ample space in the compass of one room and one day, without surprises, without decoration, with a carpet and four arm-chairs. This paucity of matter throws out the ideas more clearly and quickly; in fact, their whole aim is to bring those ideas prominently forward; the simplicity of the subject, the progress of the action, the gradation of the scenes,—to this everything tends. At every step the earnestness increases, the impression is deepened, the viciousness stands out: ridicule is piled up until, before so many apt and united appeals, laughter forces its way and breaks forth. And this laughter

is not a mere outburst of physical amusement; it is the judgment which incites it. The writer is a philosopher, who brings us into contact with a universal truth by a particular example. We understand through him, as through La Bruyère or Nicole, the force of prejudice, the obstinacy of conventionality, the blindness of love. The couplets of his dialogue, like the arguments of their treatises, are but the worked out proof and the logical justification of a preconceived conclusion. We philosophise with him on humanity; we think because he has thought. And he has only thought thus in the character of a Frenchman, for an audience of French men of the world. In him we taste a national pleasure. French refined and systematic intelligence, the most exact in seizing on the subordination of ideas, the most ready in separating ideas from matter, the most fond of clear and tangible ideas, finds in him its nourishment and its echo. None who has sought to show us mankind, has led us by a straighter and easier mode to a more distinct and speaking portrait.

I will add, to a more pleasing portrait,—and this is the main talent of comedy: it consists in keeping back what is hateful; and mark, in the world that which is hateful abounds. As soon as you will paint the world truly, philosophically, you meet with vice, injustice, and everywhere indignation; amusement flees before anger and morality. Consider the basis of *Tartufe;* an obscene pedant, a red-faced hypocritical wretch, who, palming himself off on an honest and refined family, tries to drive the son away, marry the daughter, corrupt the wife, ruin and imprison the father, and almost succeeds in it, not by clever plots, but by vulgar mummery, and by the coarse audacity of his caddish disposition. What could be more repellent? And how is amusement to be drawn from such a subject, where Beaumarchais and La Bruyère[1] failed? Similarly, in the *Misanthrope*, is not the spectacle of a loyally sincere and honest man, very much in love, whom his virtue finally overwhelms with ridicule and drives from society, a sad sight to see? Rousseau was annoyed that it should produce laughter; and if we were to look upon the subject, not in Molière, but in itself, we should find enough to revolt our natural generosity. Recall his other plots: Georges Dandin mystified, Géronte beaten, Arnolphe duped, Harpagon plundered, Sganarelle married, girls seduced, louts thrashed, simpletons turned financiers. There are sorrows here, and deep ones; many would rather weep than laugh at them. Arnolphe, Dandin, Harpagon, are almost tragic characters; and when we see them in the world instead of the theatre, we are not disposed to sarcasm, but to pity. Picture to yourself the originals from whom Molière has taken his doctors. Consider this venturesome experimentalist, who, in the interest of science, tries a new saw, or inoculates a

[1] *Onuphre*, in La Bruyère's *Caractères*, ch. xiii. *de la Mode; Begears*, in Beaumarchais' *la Mère Coupable*.

virus; think of his long nights at the hospital, the wan patient carried on a mattress to the operating table, and stretching out his leg to the knife; or again of the peasant's bed of straw in the damp cottage, where an old dropsical mother lies choking,[1] while her children grudgingly count up the crowns she has already cost them. You quit such scenes with a swelling heart, charged with sympathy for human misery; you discover that life, seen near and face to face, is a mass of trivial harshnesses and of grievous passions; you are tempted, if you wish to depict it, to enter into the mire of sorrows whereon Balzac and Shakspeare have built: you see in it no other poetry than that audacious reasoning power which from such a confusion abstracts the master-forces, or the light of the genius which flickers over the throes and the falls of so many polluted and murdered wretches. How all changes under the hand of a mercurial Frenchman! how all this human ugliness is blotted out! how amusing is the spectacle which Molière has arranged for us! how we ought to thank the great artist for having transformed his subject so well! At last we have a laughing world, on canvas at least; we could not have it otherwise, but this we have. How pleasant it is to forget truth! what an art is that which divests us of ourselves! what a point of view which converts the contortions of suffering into ridiculous grimaces! Gaiety has come upon us, the dearest of a Frenchman's possessions. The soldiers of Villars used to dance that they might forget they had no longer any bread. Of all French possessions, too, it is the best. This gift does not destroy thought, but it masks it. In Molière, truth is at the bottom, but concealed; he has heard the sobs of human tragedy, but he prefers not to echo them. It is quite enough to feel our wounds; let us not go to the theatre to see them again. Philosophy, while it reveals them, advises us not to think of them too much. Let us enliven our condition with the gaiety of free conversation and light wit, as we would the chamber of sickness. Let us muffle up Tartufe, Harpagon, the doctors, with outrageous ridicule: ridicule will make us forget their vices; they will afford us amusement instead of causing horror. Let Alceste be grumpy and awkward. It is in the first place true, because our more valiant virtues are only the outbreaks of a temper out of harmony with circumstances; but, in addition, it will be amusing. His mishaps will cease to make him the martyr of justice; they will be only the consequences of a cross-grained character. As to the mystifications of husbands, tutors, and fathers, I fancy that we are not to see in them a concerted attack on society or morality. For one evening we are entertaining ourselves, nothing more. The syringes and thrashings, the masquerades and dances, prove that it is a sheer piece of buffoonery. Do not be afraid that philosophy will perish in a pantomime; it is present even in the *Mariage forcé*, even in the *Malade imaginaire*. It is the mark of a Frenchman and a man of the world to

[1] Consultations of Sganarelle in the *Médecin malgré lui.*

clothe everything, even that which is serious, in laughter. When he is thinking, he does not always wish to show it. In his most violent moments he is still the master of the house, the polite host; he talks to you of his thoughts or of his suffering. Mirabeau, when in agony, said to one of his friends with a smile, 'Come, you who take an interest in plucky deaths, you shall see mine!' The French talk in this style when they are depicting life; no other nation knows how to philosophise lightly, and die with good taste.

This is the reason why in no other nation comedy, while it continues comic, affords a moral; Molière is the only man who gives us models without getting pedantic, without trenching on the tragic, without growing solemn. This model is the 'honest man,' as the phrase was, Philinte, Ariste, Clitandre, Eraste;[1] there is no other who can at the same time instruct us and amuse. His talent has reflection for its basis, but it is cultivated by the world. His character has honesty for its basis, but it is in harmony with the world. You may imitate him without transgressing either reason or duty; he is neither a coxcomb nor a roisterer. You can imitate him without neglecting your interests or making yourself ridiculous; he is neither an ignoramus nor unmannerly. He has read and understands the jargon of Trissotin and M. Lycidas, but in order to pierce them through and through, to beat them with their own arguments, to set the gallery in a roar at their expense. He will discuss even morality and religion, but in a style so natural, with proofs so clear, with warmth so genuine, that he interests women, and is listened to by men of the world. He knows man, and reasons upon him, but in such brief sentences, such living delineations, such pungent humour, that his philosophy is the best of entertainments. He is faithful to his ruined mistress, his calumniated friend, but gracefully, without fuss. All his actions, even noble ones, have an easy way about them which adorns them; he does nothing without diversion. His great talent is knowledge of the world; he wears it not only in the trivial circumstances of every-day life, but in the most moving scenes, the most embarrassing positions. A noble swordsman wants to take this 'honest man' as his second in a duel; he reflects a moment, excuses himself in a score of phrases, and 'without playing the Hector,' leaves the bystanders convinced that he is no coward. Armande insults him, then throws herself in his arms; he politely averts the storm, declines the offer with the most loyal frankness, and without employing a single falsehood, leaves the spectators convinced that he is no boor. When he loves Eliante,[2] who prefers Alceste, and whom Alceste may possibly marry, he proposes to her with a complete delicacy and dignity, without lowering himself, without recrimination, without wronging himself or his friend. When Oronte

[1] Amongst women, Éliante, Henriette, Élise, Uranie, Elmire.

[2] Compare the admirable tact and coolness of Éliante, Henriette, and Elmire.

reads him a sonnet, he does not assume in the fop a nature which he has not, but praises the conventional verses in conventional language, and is not so clumsy as to display a poetical judgment which would be out of place. He takes at once his tone from the circumstances; he perceives instantly what he must speak and what be silent about, in what degree and to what shade, what exact expedient will reconcile truth and conventional propriety, how far he ought to go or where to take his stand, what faint line separates decorum from flattery, truth from awkwardness. On this narrow path he proceeds free from embarrassment or mistakes, never put out of his way by the shocks or changes of circumstance, never allowing the calm smile of politeness to quit his lips, never omitting to receive with a laugh of good humour the nonsense of his neighbour. This cleverness, entirely French, reconciles in him fundamental honesty and worldly breeding; without it, he would be altogether on the one side or the other. In this way comedy finds its hero half-way between the *roué* and the preacher.

Such a theatre depicts a race and an age. This mixture of solidity and elegance belongs to the seventeenth century, and belongs to France. The world does not deprave, it develops Frenchmen; it polished then not only their manners and their homes, but also their sentiments and ideas. Conversation provoked thought; it was no mere talk, but an inquiry; with the exchange of news, it called forth the interchange of reflections. Theology entered into it, as did also philosophy; morals, and the observation of the heart, formed its daily pabulum. Science kept up the sap, and lost only the thorns. Diversion cloaked reason, but did not smother it. Frenchmen never think better than in society; the play of features excites them; their ready ideas flash into lightning, in their shock with the ideas of others. The varied movements of conversation suit their fits and starts; the frequent change of subject fosters their invention; the pungency of piquant speeches reduces truth to small but precious coin, suitable to the lightness of their hands. And the heart is no more tainted by it than the intelligence. The Frenchman is of a sober temperament, with little taste for the brutishness of the drunkard, for violent joviality, for the riot of loose suppers; he is moreover gentle, obliging, always ready to please; to set him at ease, he needs that flow of goodwill and elegance which the world supplies and cherishes. And in accordance therewith, he shapes his temperate and amiable inclinations into maxims; it is a point of honour with him to be serviceable and refined. Such is the honest man, the product of society in a sociable race. It was not so with the people in England. Their ideas do not spring up in chance conversation, but by the concentration of solitary thought; this is the reason why ideas were then wanting. Honesty is not the fruit of sociable instincts, but of personal reflection; that is why honesty was then at a discount. The brutish foundation remained; the outside alone was smooth. Manners were gentle, sentiments harsh; speech was studied, ideas frivolous. Thought

himself are gradually arranged into characters; he can only invent after his given model and his acquired experience; and his characters only manifest what he is, or abridge what he has seen. Two features are prominent in this world; they are prominent also on this stage. All the successful characters can be reduced to two classes—natural beings on the one part, and artificial on the other; the first with the coarseness and shamelessness of their primitive inclinations, the second with the frivolities and vices of worldly habits: the first uncultivated, their simplicity revealing nothing but their innate baseness; the second cultivated, their refinement instilling into them nothing but a new corruption. And the talent of the writers is suited to the painting of these two groups: they have the grand English faculty, which is the knowledge of exact detail and real sentiments; they see gestures, surroundings, dresses; they hear the sounds of voices, and they have the courage to exhibit them; they have inherited, very little, and at a great distance, and in spite of themselves, still they have inherited from Shakspeare; they manipulate openly, and without any softening, the coarse harsh red colour which alone can bring out the figures of their brutes. On the other hand, they have animation and a good style; they can express the thoughtless chatter, the foolish affectations, the inexhaustible and capricious abundance of drawing-room stupidities; they have as much liveliness as the most foolish, and at the same time they speak as well as the best instructed; they can give the model of witty conversations; they have lightness of touch, brilliancy, and also facility, exactness, without which you cannot draw the portrait of a man of the world. They find naturally on their palette the strong colours which suit their barbarians, and the pretty tints which suit their exquisites.

VIII.

First there is the blockhead, Squire Sullen, a low kind of sot, of whom his wife speaks in this fashion: 'After his man and he had rolled about the room, like sick passengers in a storm, he comes flounce into bed, dead as a salmon into a fishmonger's basket; his feet cold as ice, his breath hot as a furnace, and his hands and his face as greasy as his flannel nightcap. O matrimony! He tosses up the clothes with a barbarous swing over his shoulders, disorders the whole economy of my bed, leaves me half naked, and my whole night's comfort is the tuneable serenade of that wakeful nightingale, his nose!'[1] Sir John Brute says: 'What the plague did I marry her (his wife) for? I knew she did not like me; if she had, she would have lain with me.'[2] He turns his drawing-room into a stable, smokes it foul to drive the women away, throws his pipe at their heads, drinks, swears, and curses. Coarse words and oaths flow through his conversation like filth through a

[1] Farquhar, *The Beaux Stratagem*, ii. 1.
[2] Vanbrugh, *Provoked Wife*, v. 6.

gutter. He drinks himself drunk at the tavern, and howls out, 'Damn morality! and damn the watch! and let the constable be married.'[1] He cries out that he is a free-born Englishman; he wants to go out and break everything. He leaves the inn with other besotted scamps, and attacks the women in the street. He robs a tailor who was carrying a doctor's gown, puts it on, thrashes the guard. He is seized and taken by the constable; on the road he breaks out into abuse, and ends by proposing to him, amid the hiccups and stupid reiterations of a drunken man, to go and find out somewhere a bottle and a girl. He returns at last, covered with blood and mud, growling like a dog, with red swollen eyes, calling his wife a slut and a liar. He goes to her, forcibly embraces her, and as she turns away, cries, 'I see it goes damnably against your stomach—and therefore—kiss me again. (Kisses and tumbles her.) So, now you being as dirty and as nasty as myself, we may go pig together.'[2] He wants to get a cup of cold tea out of the closet, kicks open the door, and discovers his wife's and niece's gallants. He storms, raves madly with his clammy tongue, then suddenly falls asleep. His valet comes and takes the insensible burden on his shoulders.[3] It is the portrait of a mere animal, and I fancy it is not a nice one.

That is the husband; let us look at the father, Sir Tunbelly Clumsey, a country gentleman, elegant, if any of them were. Tom Fashion knocks at the door of the mansion, which looks like 'Noah's ark,' and where they receive people as in a besieged city. A servant appears at a window with a blunderbuss in his hand, who is at last unwillingly [redacted] to let his master know. 'Ralph, go thy weas, and [redacted] to be waited upon. And dost hear? call to nurse, that she may [redacted] Hoyden before the geat's open.'[4] You see in this house they keep a watch over the girls. Sir Tunbelly comes up with his people, armed with guns, pitchforks, scythes, and clubs, in no amiable mood, and wants to know the name of his visitor. 'Till I know your name, I shall not ask you to come into my house; and when I know your name—'tis six to four I don't ask you neither.'[5] He is like a [redacted] growling and looking at the calves of an intruder. But he presently [redacted] that this intruder is his future son-in-law; he utters some exclamations, and makes his excuses. 'Cod's my life! I ask your lordship's pardon ten thousand times. (*To a servant.*) Here, run in a-doors quickly. Get a Scotch-coal fire in the great parlour; set all the Turkey-work chairs in their places; get the great brass candlesticks out, and be sure stick the sockets full of laurel. Run! . . . And do you hear, run away to nurse, bid her let Miss Hoyden loose

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[4] Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, iii. 3. [5] *Ibid.*

again, and if it was not shifting-day, let her put on a clean tucker, quick!'[1] The false son-in-law wants to marry Hoyden straight off. 'Not so soon neither! that's shooting my girl before you bid her stand. . . . Besides, my wench's wedding-gown is not come home yet.'[2] The other suggests that a speedy marriage will save money. Spare money? says the father, 'Udswoons, I'll give my wench a wedding-dinner, though I go to grass with the king of Assyria for't. . . . Ah! poor gi' she'll be scared out of her wits on her wedding-night; for, honestly speaki she does not know a man from a woman but by his beard a breeches.'[3] Foppington, the true son-in-law, arrives r T taking him for an impostor, calls him a dog; H ron him in the horse-pond; they bind him into the dog-kennel; Sir Tunbell threatens to knock his teeth d discovered the impostor, he sa or shall I? . . . Here, give me me beat out his brains, and tha lunatic, and wants to fall upon hi gentleman, landlord and farmer, b There steams up from all these sce riot, the odour of a dunghill.

Like father like child. What a ca She grumbles to herself, 'It's well I have a I'd marry the baker; I would so! Nobod presently I must be locked up; and here's th can run loose about the house all the day lon When the nurse tells her her future h or joy, and kisses the old woman, ' go pu n my laced smock, though I'm whipped till the blood run down my heels for't.'[6] Tom comes himself, and asks her if she will be his wife. 'Sir, I never disobey my father in anything but eating of green gooseberries.' But your father wants to wait . . . 'a whole week.' 'A week!—why, I shall be an old woman by that time.'[7] I cannot give all her answers. There is the spirit of a she-goat under her kitchen-talk. She mar om secretly on the spot, and the chaplain wishes them m 'Ecod,' she says, 'with all my heart! the more the r rrier, I say; ha! nurse!'[8]

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[1] Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, iii. 3. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 5. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.* v. 5.
[5] *Ibid.* iii. 4. [6] *Ibid.* [7] *Ibid.* iv. 1.

[8] *Ibid.* iv. 4. The character of the nurse is excellent. Tom Fashion thanks her for the training she has given Hoyden: 'Alas, all I can boast of is, I gave her pure *good milk, and so your honour would have said, an you had seen how the poor thing sucked it.—Eh! God's blessing on the sweet face on't! how it used to hang at this poor teat, and suck and squeeze, and kick and sprawl it would, till the belly on't was so full, it would drop off like a leech.*'

This is genuine, even after Juliet's nurse in Shakspeare.

But Lord Foppington, the true intended, turns up, and Tom makes off. Instantly her plan is formed. She bids the nurse and chaplain hold their tongues. 'If you two will be sure to hold your tongues, and not say a word of what's past, I'll e'en marry this lord too.' 'What,' says nurse, 'two husbands, my dear?' 'Why, you had three, good nurse, you may hold your tongue.'[1] She nevertheless takes a dislike to the lord, and very soon; he is not well made, he hardly gives her enough pocket money; she hesitates between the two. 'If I leave my lord, I leave my lady too; and when I rattle about the streets in my [illegible] only say, There goes mistress—mistress—mistress what? this man's [illegible] have married, nurse?' 'Squire Fashion.' 'Fash[illegible] quire, that's better than nothing.[2] .... [illegible]ve him, nurse? ecod, I would not but once married to him!—No— at work I'll make when I get to lady both, nurse, ecod, I'll flaunt [illegible] is cautious all the same. She his [illegible] whip handy, and that he will give her a good [illegible] 'But, d'ye hear?' she says to the nurse. 'Pray, take care of one thing: when the business comes to break out, be sure you get between me and my father, for you know his tricks; he'll knock me down.'[4] Here is your true moral ascendency. For such a character, there is no other, and Sir Tunbelly does well to keep her tied up, and to let her taste a discipline of daily stripes.[5]

IX.

Let us accompany this modest char[illegible] to town, and place her with her equals in fine society. All these candid folk do wonders there, both in the way of actions and maxims. Wycherley's *Country Wife* gives us the tone. When one of them happens to find herself half honest,[6] she has the manners and the boldness of a hussar. Others seem born with the souls of courtesans and procuresses. 'If I marry my lord Aimwell,' says Dorinda, 'there will be title, place, and precedence, the Park, the play, and the drawing-room, splendour, equipage, noise, and flambeaux.—Hey, my lady Aimwell's servants there! Lights, lights to the stairs! my lady Aimwell's coach put forward! Stand by, make room for her ladyship!—Are not these things moving?'[7] She is open, and so are others—Corinna, Miss Betty, Belinda, for example. Belinda says to her aunt, whose virtue is tottering: 'The sooner you capitulate the better.'[8] Further on, when she has decided to marry

[1] Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, iv. 6. [2] *Ibid.* v. 5. [3] *Ibid.* iv. 1. [4] *Ibid.* v. 5.
[5] See also the character of a young stupid blockhead, Squire Humphrey. (Vanbrugh's *Journey to London.*) He has only a single idea, to be always eating.
[6] Wycherley's Hippolita; Farquhar's Silvia.
[7] Farquhar's *Beaux Stratagem*, iv. 1. [8] Vanbrugh's *Provoked Wife*, iii. 3.

Heartfree, to save her aunt who is compromised, she makes a confession of faith which promises well for the future of her new spouse: 'Were't not for your affair in the balance, I should go near to pick up some odious man of quality yet, and only take poor Heartfree for a gallant.'[1] These young ladies are clever, and in all cases apt to follow good instruction. Hear Miss Prue: 'Look you here, madam, then, what Mr. Tattle has given me.—Look you here, cousin, here's a snuff-box; nay, there's snuff in't;—here, will you have any?—Oh, good! how sweet it is!—Mr. Tattle is all over sweet; his peruke is s[illegible] and his gloves are sweet, and his handkerchief is sweet, pu[illegible] sweeter than roses.—Smell him, mother, ma[illegible] I mean.—He g[illegible] this ring for a kiss. . . . Smell, cousin; [illegible]e me son[illegible] that will make my smocks smell this [illegible] than lavender, mun.—I'm resolved [illegible] lavender among my smocks—ha, [illegible] a young magpie, who flies for the [illegible] tells her he is going to make love:

'*Miss P.* Well; and how will you make love to me? c[illegible] begin. Must I make love too? you must tell me how.

T. You must let me speak, miss, you must not speak first; I must ask you questions, and you must answer.

Miss P. What, is it like the catechism?—come then, ask me.

T. D'ye think you can love me?

Miss P. Yes.

T. Pooh! pox! you must not say yes already; I shan't care a farthing for you then in a twinkling.

Miss P. What must I say then?

T. Why, you must say no, or you believe not, or you can't tell.

Miss P. Why, must I tell a lie then?

T. Yes, if you'd be well-bred;—all well-bred persons lie.—Besides, you are a woman, you must never speak what you think: your words must contradict your thoughts; but your actions may contradict your words. So, when I ask you, if you can love me, you must say no, but you must love me too. If I tell you you are handsome, you must deny it, and say I flatter you. But you must think yourself more charming than I speak you: and like me, for the beauty which I say you have, as much as if I had it myself. If I ask you to kiss me, you must be angry, but you must not refuse me. . . .

Miss P. O Lord, I swear this is pure!—I like it better than our old-fashioned country way of speaking one's mind;—and must not you lie too?

T. Hum!—Yes; but you must believe I speak truth.

Miss P. O Gemini! well, I always had a great mind to tell lies; but they frighted me, and said it was a sin.

T. Well, my pretty creature; will you make me happy by giving me a kiss?

Miss P. No, indeed; I'm angry at you. (*Runs and kisses him.*)

T. Hold, hold, that's pretty well;—but you should not have given it me, but have suffered me to have taken it.

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[1] Vanbrugh's *Provoked Wife*, v. 2. [2] Congreve's *Love for Love*, ii. 10

Miss P. Well, we'll do it again.
T. With all my heart. Now, then, my little angel. (*Kisses her.*)
Miss P. Pish!
T. That's right—again, my charmer! (*Kisses again.*)
Miss P. O fy! nay, now I can't abide you.
T. Admirable! that was as well as if you had been born and bred in Covent-Garden.'[1]

She makes such rapid progress, that we must stop the quotation forthwith. And mark, what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. All these charming characters soon employ the language of kitchen-maids. When Ben, the dolt of a sailor, wants to make love to Miss Prue, she sends him off with a flea in his ear, raves, lets loose a string of cries and coarse expressions, calls him a 'great sea-calf.' 'What does father mean,' he says, 'to leave me alone, as soon as I come home, with such a dirty dowdy? Sea-calf! I an't calf enough to lick your chalked face, you cheese-curd, you.' Moved by these amenities, she breaks out into a rage, weeps, calls him 'a stinking tar-barrel.'[2] They come and put a stop to this first essay at gallantry. She fires up, declares she will marry Tattle, or else Robin the butler. Her father says, Hussy, you shall have a rod.' She answers, 'A fiddle of a rod! I'll have a husband: and if you won't get me one, I'll get one for myself. I'll marry our Robin the butler.'[3] Here are pretty and prancing mares if you like; but decidedly, in these authors' hands, the natural man becomes nothing but a waif from the stable or the kennel.

Will you be better pleased by the educated man? The worldly life which they depict is a regular carnival, and the heads of their heroines are full of wild imaginations and unchecked gossip. You may see in Congreve how they chatter, with what a flow of words and affectations, with what a shrill and modulated voice, with what gestures, what twisting of arms and neck, what looks raised to heaven, what genteel airs, what grimaces. Lady Wishfort speaks:

'But art thou sure Sir Rowland will not fail to come? or will he not fail when he does come? Will he be importunate, Foible, and push? For if he should not be importunate, I shall never break decorums:—I shall die with confusion, if I am forced to advance.—Oh no, I can never advance!—I shall swoon, if he should expect advances. No, I hope Sir Rowland is better bred than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms. I won't be too coy neither—I won't give him despair—but a little disdain is not amiss; a little scorn is alluring.' *Foible.* 'A little scorn becomes your ladyship.' *Lady W.* 'Yes, but tenderness becomes me best—a sort of dyingness—you see that picture has a sort of a—ha, Foible! a swimmingness in the eye—yes, I'll look so—my niece affects it; but she wants features. Is Sir Rowland handsome? Let my toilet be removed—I'll dress above. I'll receive Sir Rowland here. Is he handsome? Don't answer me. I won't know: I'll be surprised, I'll be taken by surprise.[4] . . . And how do I look, Foible?'

[1] Congreve's *Love for Love*, ii. 11. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 7. [3] *Ibid.* v. 6.
[4] Congreve, *The Way of the World*, iii. 5.

F. 'Most killing well, madam.' *Lady W.* 'Well, and how shall I receive him? in what figure shall I give his heart the first impression? . . . Shall I sit?—no, I won't sit—I'll walk—ay, I'll walk from the door upon his entrance; and then turn full upon him—no, that will be too sudden. I'll lie—ay, I'll lie down—I'll receive him in my little dressing-room; there's a couch—yes, yes, I'll give the first impression on a couch. I won't lie neither, but loll and lean upon one elbow: with one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way—yes—and then as soon as he appears, start, ay, start, and be surprised, and rise to meet him in a pretty disorder.'[1]

These hesitations of a finished coquette become still more vehement at the critical moment. Lady Plyant thinks herself beloved by Mellefont, who does not love her at all, and tries in vain to undeceive her.

Mel. 'For Heaven's sake, madam.' *Lady P.* 'O, name it no more!—Bless me, how can you talk of heaven! and have so much wickedness in your heart? May be you don't think it a sin.—They say some of you gentlemen don't think it a sin.—May be it is no sin to them that don't think it so; indeed, if I did not think it a sin—but still my honour, if it were no sin.—But then, to marry my daughter, for the conveniency of frequent opportunities, I'll never consent to that; as sure as can be, I'll break the match.' *Mel.* 'Death and amazement.—Madam, upon my knees.' *Lady P.* 'Nay, nay, rise up; come, you shall see my good nature. I know love is powerful, and nobody can help his passion: 'tis not your fault; nor I swear it is not mine. How can I help it, if I have charms? and how can you help it if you are made a captive? I swear it is pity it should be a fault. But my honour,—well, but your honour too—but the sin!—well, but the necessity—O Lord, here is somebody coming, I dare not stay. Well, you must consider of your crime; and strive as much as can be against it,—strive, be sure—but don't be melancholic, don't despair.—But never think that I'll grant you anything; O Lord, no.—But be sure you lay aside all thoughts of the marriage: for though I know you don't love Cynthia, only as a blind to your passion for me, yet it will make me jealous.—O Lord, what did I say? jealous! no, no; I can't be jealous, for I must not love you—therefore don't hope,—but don't despair neither.—O, they're coming! I must fly.'[2]

She escapes, and we will not follow her.

This giddiness, this volubility, this pretty corruption, these reckless and affected airs, are collected in the most brilliant, the most worldly portrait of the stage we are discussing, that of Mrs. Millamant, 'a fine lady,' as the Dramatis Personæ say.[3] She enters, 'with her fan spread and her streamers out,' dragging a train of furbelows and ribbons, passing through the crowd of laced and bedizened fops, in splendid perukes, who flutter about her path, haughty and wanton, witty and scornful, toying with gallantries, petulant, with a horror of every grave word and sustained action, falling in only with change and pleasure. She laughs at the sermons of Mirabell, her suitor:

[1] Congreve, *The Way of the World*, iv.
[2] Congreve, *The Double-dealer*, ii. 5.
[3] Congreve, *The Way of the World.*

'Sententious Mirabell!—Prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible wise face, like Solomon at the dividing of the child in an old tapestry-hanging.[1] . . . Ha! ha! ha!—pardon me, dear creature, though I grant you 'tis a little barbarous, ha! ha! ha!'[2]

She breaks out into laughter, then gets into a rage, then banters, then sings, then makes faces. Her attractions change at every motion while you look at her. It is a regular whirlpool; all turns round in her brain as in a clock when the mainspring is broken. Nothing can be prettier than her fashion of entering on matrimony:

Mill. 'Ah! I'll never marry unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure! . . . My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? my faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you then adieu? Ay—h—adieu—my morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye *douceurs*, ye *sommeils du matin*, adieu?—I can't do it; 'tis more than impossible—positively, Mirabell, I'll lie a-bed in a morning as long as I please.' *Mir.* 'Then I'll get up in a morning as early as I please.' *Mill.* 'Ah! idle creature, get up when you will—and d'ye hear, I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.' *Mir.* 'Names!' *Mill.* 'Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet heart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar—I shall never bear that—good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler, and Sir Francis. . . . Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together; but let us be very strange and well-bred: let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well-bred as if we were not married at all.' . . . *Mir.* 'Shall I kiss your hand upon the contract?'[3] *Mill.* 'Fainall, what shall I do? shall I have him? I think I must have him.' *Fain.* 'Ay, ay, take him. What should you do?' *Mill.* 'Well then—I'll take my death I'm in a horrid fright—Fainall, I shall never say it—well—I think—I'll endure you.' *Fain.* 'Fy! fy! have him, have him, and tell him so in plain terms: for I am sure you have a mind to him.' *Mill.* 'Are you? I think I have—and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too—well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have you—I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked—here kiss my hand though.—So, hold your tongue now, don't say a word.'[4]

The agreement is complete. I should like to see one more article to it—a divorce '*a mensâ et thoro*:' this would be the genuine marriage of the worldlings, that is, a decent divorce. And I answer for it; in two years, Mirabell and Millamant will come to this. Hither tends the whole of this theatre; for, with regard to the women, but particularly with regard to the married women, I have only presented their most amiable aspects. Deeper down it is all gloomy, bitter, above all, pernicious. It represents a household as a prison, marriage as a warfare, woman as a rebel, adultery as the result looked for, disorder as the right condition, extravagance as pleasure.[5] A woman of fashion goes

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[1] Congreve's *Way of the World*, ii. 6.
[2] *Ibid.* iii. 11.
[3] *Ibid.* iv. 5.
[4] *Ibid.* iv. 6.
[5] *Amanda.* 'How did you live together?' *Berinthia.* 'Like man and wife, asunder.—He loved the country, I the town. He hawks and hounds, I coaches and equipage. He eating and drinking, I carding and playing. He the sound of a

to bed in the morning, rises at mid-day, curses her husband, listens to obscenities, frequents balls, haunts the plays, ruins reputations, turns her home into a gambling-house, borrows money, allures men, associates her honour and fortune with debts and assignations. 'We are as wicked (as men),' says Lady Bute, 'but our vices lie another way. Men have more courage than we, so they commit more bold, impudent sins. They quarrel, fight, swear, drink, blaspheme, and the like; whereas we, being cowards, only backbite, tell lies, cheat at cards, and so forth.'[1] Excellent catalogue, where the gentlemen are included with the rest! The world has done nothing but arm them with correct phrases and elegant dresses. In Congreve especially they have the best style; above all, they know how to hand ladies about and entertain them with news; they are expert in the fence of retorts and replies; they are never out of countenance, find means to make the most ticklish notions understood; they discuss very well, speak excellently, salute still better; but to sum up, they are blackguards, epicureans on system, professed seducers. They set forth immorality in maxims, and reason out their vice. 'Give me,' says one, 'a man that keeps his five senses keen and bright as his sword, that has 'em always drawn out in their just order and strength, with his reason, as commander at the head of 'em, that detaches 'em by turns upon whatever party of pleasure agreeably offers, and commands 'em to retreat upon the least appearance of disadvantage or danger. . . . I love a fine house, but let another keep it; and just so I love a fine woman.'[2] One deliberately seduces his friend's wife; another under a false name gets possession of his brother's intended. A third hires false witnesses to secure a dowry. I must ask the reader to consult for himself the fine stratagems of Worthy, Mirabell, and

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horn, I the squeak of a fiddle. We were dull company at table, worse a-bed. Whenever we met, we gave one another the spleen; and never agreed but once, which was about lying alone.'—Vanbrugh, *Relapse*, Act ii. *ad fin.*

Compare Vanbrugh, *A Journey to London.* Rarely has the repulsiveness and corruption of the brutish or worldly nature been more vividly displayed. Little Betty and her brother, Squire Humphry, deserve hanging.

Again. *Mrs. Foresight.* 'Do you think any woman honest?' *Scandal.* 'Yes, several very honest; they'll cheat a little at cards, sometimes; but that's nothing.' *Mrs. F.* 'Pshaw! but virtuous, I mean.' *S.* 'Yes, faith; I believe some women are virtuous too; but 'tis as I believe some men are valiant, through fear. For why should a man court danger or a woman shun pleasure?'—Congreve, *Love for Love*, iii. 14.

[1] Vanbrugh, *Provoked Wife*, v. 2. Compare also in this piece the character of Mademoiselle, the French chambermaid. They represent French vice as even more shameless than English vice.

[2] Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem*, i. 1; and in the same piece here is the catechism of love: 'What are the objects of that passion?—youth, beauty, and clean linen.' And from the *Mock Astrologer* of Dryden: 'As I am a gentleman, a man about town, one that wears good cloths, eats, drinks, and wenches sufficiently.'

others. They are coldblooded rascals who commit treachery, adultery, scoundrelism, like trained experts. They are represented here as men of fashion; they are young leaders, heroes, and as such they manage to get hold of an heiress. We must go to Mirabell for an example of this medley of corruption and elegance. Mrs. Fainall, his old mistress, married by him to a common friend, a miserable wretch, complains to him of this hateful marriage. He appeases her, gives her advice, shows her the precise mode, the true expedient for setting things on a comfortable footing. 'You should have just so much disgust for your husband, as may be sufficient to make you relish your lover.' She cries in despair, 'Why did you make me marry this man?' He smiles calmly, 'Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? to save that idol, reputation.' How tender is this argument! How can a man better console a woman whom he has plunged into bitter unhappiness! What a touching logic in the insinuation which follows: 'If the familiarities of our loves had produced that consequence of which you were apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father's name with credit, but on a husband?' He insists on his reason in an excellent style; listen to the distinction of a man of feeling: 'A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse had not answered to the purpose. When you are weary of him, you know your remedy.'[1] Thus are a woman's feelings to be considered, especially a woman whom we have loved. To cap all, this delicate conversation is meant to force the poor deserted Mrs. Fainall into an intrigue which shall obtain for Mirabell a pretty wife and a good dowry. Certainly this gentleman knows the world; no one could better employ a former mistress. Such are the cultivated characters of this theatre, as dishonest as the uncultivated ones: having transformed their evil instincts into systematic vices, lust into debauchery, brutality into cynicism, perversity into depravity, deliberate egotists, calculating sensualists, with rules for their immorality, reducing feeling to self-interest, honour to decorum, happiness to pleasure.

The English Restoration altogether was one of those great crises which, while warping the development of a society and a literature, show the inward spirit which they modify, but which contradicts them. Society did not lack vigour, nor literature talent; men of the world were polished, writers inventive. There was a court, drawing-rooms, conversation, worldly life, a taste for letters, the example of France, peace, leisure, the influence of the sciences, politics, theology,—in short, all the happy circumstances which can elevate the intellect and civilise manners. There was the vigorous satire of Wycherley, the sparkling dialogue and fine raillery of Congreve, the frank nature and animation of Vanbrugh, the manifold inventions of Farquhar, in brief, all the resources which might nourish the comic element, and add a genuine

[1] Congreve, *The Way of the World*, ii. 4.

theatre to the best constructions of human intelligence. Nothing came to a head; all was abortive. The age has left nothing but the memory of corruption; their comedy remains a repertory of viciousness; society had only a soiled elegance, literature a frigid wit. Their manners were gross and trivial; their ideas are futile or incomplete. Through disgust and reaction, a revolution was at hand in literary feeling and moral habits, as well as in general beliefs and political institutions. Man was to change altogether, and at a single turn. The same repugnance and the same experience was to detach him from every aspect of his old condition. The Englishman discovered that he was not monarchical, Papistical, nor sceptical, but liberal, Protestant, and devout. He came to understand that he was not a roisterer nor a worldling, but reflective and introspective. He contains a current of animal life too violent to suffer him without danger to abandon himself to enjoyment; he needs a barrier of moral reasoning to repress his outbreaks. He contains a current of attention and will too strong to suffer himself to rest content with trifles; he needs some weighty and serviceable labour on which to expend his power. He needs a barrier and an employment. He needs a constitution and a religion which shall restrain him by duties which must be performed, and rights which must be defended. He is content only in a serious and orderly life; there he finds the natural groove and the necessary outlet of his passions and his faculties. From this time he enters upon it, and this theatre itself exhibits the token. It remakes and transforms itself. Collier threw discredit upon it; Addison condemned it. National sentiment awoke from the dream; French manners are jeered at; the prologues celebrate the defeats of Louis XIV.; the licence, elegance, religion of his court, are presented under a ridiculous or odious light.[1] Immorality gradually diminishes, marriage is more respected, the heroines go no further than to the verge of adultery;[2] the roisterers are pulled up at the critical moment; one of them suddenly declares himself purified, and speaks in verse, the better to mark his enthusiasm; another praises marriage;[3] some aspire in the fifth act to an orderly life. We shall soon see Steele writing a moral treatise called *The Christian Hero*. Henceforth comedy declines, and literary talent flows into another channel. Essay, romance, pamphlet, dissertation, displace the drama; and the English classical spirit, abandoning the kinds of writing which are foreign to its nature, enters

[1] The part of Chaplain Foigard in Farquhar's *Beaux Stratagem;* of Mademoiselle, and generally of all the French people.

[2] The part of Amanda in Vanbrugh's *Relapse;* of Mrs. Sullen; the conversion of two roisterers, in the *Beaux Stratagem*.

[3] 'Though marriage be a lottery in which there are a wondrous many blanks, yet there is one inestimable lot, in which the only heaven upon earth is written.'

[4] 'To be capable of loving one, doubtless, is better than to possess a thousand.' —VANBRUGH.

upon the great works which are destined to immortalise it and give it expression.

X.

Nevertheless, in this continuous decline of dramatic invention, and in the great change of literary vitality, some shoots strike out at distant intervals towards comedy; for mankind always seeks for entertainment, and the theatre is always a place of entertainment. The tree once planted grows, feebly without a doubt, with long intervals of almost total dryness and almost constant barrenness, yet subject to imperfect renewals of life, to passing partial blossomings, sometimes to an inferior fruitage bursting forth from the lowest branches. Even when the great subjects are worn out, there is still room here and there for a happy idea. Let a wit, clever and experienced, take it in hand, he will catch up a few oddities on his way, he will introduce on the scene some vice or fault of his time; the public will come in crowds, and ask no better than to recognise itself and laugh. There was one of these successes when Gay, in the *Beggars' Opera*, brought out the rascaldom of the great world, and avenged the public on Walpole and the court; another, when Goldsmith, inventing a series of mistakes, led his hero and his audience through five acts of blunders.[1] After all, if true comedy can only exist in certain ages, ordinary comedy can exist in any age. It is too near akin to the pamphlet, novels, satire, not to raise itself occasionally by its propinquity. If I have an enemy, instead of attacking him in a brochure, I can take my fling at him on the stage. If I am capable of painting a character in a story, I am not far from having the talent to bring out the pith of this same character in a few turns of a dialogue. If I can quietly ridicule a vice in a copy of verses, I shall easily arrive at making this vice speak out from the mouth of an actor. At least I shall be tempted to try it; I shall be seduced by the wonderful *éclat* which the footlights, declamation, scenery give to an idea; I shall try and bring my own into this strong light; I shall go in for it even when it is necessary that my talent be a little or a good deal forced for the occasion. If need be, I shall delude myself, substitute expedients for fresh originality and true comic genius. If on a few points I am inferior to the great masters, on some, it may be, I surpass them; I can work up my style, refine upon it, discover happier words, more striking jokes, livelier exchange of brilliant repartees, newer images, more picturesque comparisons; I can take from this one a character, from the other a situation, borrow of a neighbouring nation, out of old plays, good novels, biting pamphlets, pointed satires, and small newspapers; I can accumulate effects, serve up to the public a stronger and more appetising stew; above all, I can perfect my machine, oil the wheels, plan the surprises, the stage

[1] *She Stoops to Conquer.*

effects, the see-saw of the plot, like a consummate playwright. The art of constructing plays is as capable of development as the art of clockmaking. The farce-writer of to-day sees that the catastrophe of half of Molière's plays is ridiculous; nay, many of them can produce effects better than Molière; in the long run, they succeed in stripping the theatre of all awkwardness and circumlocution. A piquant style, and perfect machinery; pungency in all the words, and animation in all the scenes; a superabundance of wit, and marvels of ingenuity; over all this, a true physical activity, and the secret pleasure of depicting and justifying oneself, of public self-glorification: here is the foundation of the *School for Scandal*, here the source of the talent and the success of Sheridan.

He was the contemporary of Beaumarchais, and resembled him in his talent and in his life. The two epochs, the two schools of drama, the two characters, correspond. Like Beaumarchais, he was a lucky adventurer, clever, amiable, and generous, reaching success through scandal, who flashed up and shone in a moment, scaled with a rush the empyrean of politics and literature, settled himself, as it were, among the constellations, and, like a brilliant rocket, presently went out in the darkness. Nothing failed him; he attained all at the first leap, without apparent effort, like a prince who need only show himself to win a place. All the most surpassing happiness, the most brilliant in art, the most exalted in worldly position, he took as his birthright. The poor unknown youth, wretched translator of an unreadable Greek sophist, who at twenty walked about Bath in a red waistcoat and a cocked hat, destitute of hope, and ever conscious of the emptiness of his pockets, had gained the heart of the most admired beauty and musician of her time, had carried her off from ten rich, elegant, titled adorers, had fought with the best-hoaxed of the ten, beaten him, had carried by storm the curiosity and attention of the public. Then, challenging glory and wealth, he placed successively on the stage the most diverse and the most applauded dramas, comedies, farce, opera, serious verse; he bought and worked a large theatre without a farthing, inaugurated a reign of successes and pecuniary advantages, and led a life of elegance amid the enjoyments of social and domestic joys, surrounded by universal admiration and wonder. Thence, aspiring yet higher, he conquered power, entered the House of Commons, showed himself a match for the first orators, opposed Pitt, accused Warren Hastings, supported Fox, jeered at Burke; sustained with *éclat*, disinterestedness, and constancy, a most difficult and generous part; became one of the three or four most noted men in England, an equal of the greatest lords, the friend of a royal prince, in the end even Receiver-General of the Duchy of Cornwall, treasurer to the fleet. In every career he took the lead. As Byron said of him:

'Whatsoever Sheridan has done or chosen to do has been, *par excellence*, always the *best* of its kind. He has written the *best* comedy (*The School for*

Scandal), the best drama (in my mind far before that St. Giles lampoon *The Beggar's Opera*), the best farce (*The Critic*—it is only too good for a farce), and the best Address (*Monologue on Garrick*), and, to crown all, delivered the very best oration (the famous Begum Speech) ever conceived or heard in this country.'[1]

All ordinary rules were reversed in his favour. He was forty-four years old, debts began to shower down on him; he had supped and drunk to excess; his cheeks were purple, his nose red. In this state he met at the Duke of Devonshire's a charming young lady with whom he fell in love. At the first sight she exclaimed, 'What an ugly man, a regular monster!' He spoke to her; she confessed that he was very ugly, but that he had a good deal of wit. He spoke again, and again, and she found him very amiable. He spoke yet again, and she loved him, and resolved at all hazard to marry him. The father, a prudent man, wishing to end the affair, gave out that his future son-in-law must provide a dowry of fifteen thousand pounds; the fifteen thousand pounds were deposited as by magic in the hands of a banker; the young couple set off into the country; and Sheridan, meeting his son, a fine strapping son, ill-disposed to the marriage, persuaded him that it was the most reasonable thing a father could do, and the most fortunate event that a son could rejoice over. Whatever the business, whoever the man, he persuaded; none withstood him, every one fell under his charm. What more difficult than for an ugly man to make a young girl forget his ugliness?

There is one thing more difficult, and that is to make a creditor forget you owe him money. There is something more difficult still, and that is, to borrow money of a creditor who has come to demand it. One day one of his friends was arrested for debt; Sheridan sends for Mr. Henderson, the crabbed tradesman, coaxes him, interests him, moves him to tears, lifts him out of himself, hedges him in with general considerations and lofty eloquence, so that Mr. Henderson offers his purse, actually wants to lend two hundred pounds, insists, and finally, to his great joy, obtains permission to lend it. No one was ever more amiable, quicker to win confidence than Sheridan; rarely has the sympathetic, affectionate, and fascinating character been more fully displayed; he was literally seductive. In the morning, creditors and visitors filled the rooms in which he lived; he came in smiling, with an easy manner, with so much loftiness and grace, that the people forgot their wants and their claims, and looked as if they had only come to see him. His animation was irresistible; no one had a more dazzling wit; he had an inexhaustible fund of puns, contrivances, sallies, novel ideas. Lord Byron, who was a good judge, said that he had never heard nor conceived of a more extraordinary conversation. Men spent nights in listening to him; no one equalled him during a supper; even when drunk he retained his wit. One day he was picked up by the watch, and

[1] *The Works of Lord Byron*, 18 vols., ed. Moore, 1832, ii. p. 303.

they asked him his name; he gravely answered, 'Wilberforce.' With strangers and inferiors he had no arrogance or stiffness; he possessed in an eminent degree that unreserved character which always exhibits itself complete, which holds back none of its light, which abandons and gives itself up; he wept when he received a sincere eulogy from Lord Byron, or in recounting his miseries as a plebeian parvenu. Nothing is more charming than these effusions; they set out by placing people on a footing of peace and amity; men suddenly desert their defensive and precautionary attitude; they perceive that he is giving himself up to them, and they give themselves up to him; the outpouring of his heart excites the outpouring of theirs. A minute later, Sheridan's impetuous and sparkling individuality flashes out; his wit explodes, rattles like a discharge of fire-arms; he takes the conversation to himself, with a sustained brilliancy, a variety, an inexhaustible vigour, till five o'clock in the morning. Against such a necessity for launching out in unconsidered speech, of indulgence, of self-outpouring, a man had need be well on his guard; life cannot be passed like a holiday; it is a strife against others and against oneself; people must think of the future, mistrust themselves, make provision; there is no subsisting without the precaution of a shopkeeper, the calculation of a tradesman. If you sup too often, you will end by not having wherewithal to dine upon; when your pockets have holes in them, the shillings will fall out; nothing is more of a truism, but it is true. Sheridan's debts accumulated, his digestion failed. He lost his seat in Parliament, his theatre was burned; sheriff's officer succeeded sheriff's officer, and they had long been in possession of his house. At last, a bailiff arrested the dying man in his bed, and was for taking him off in his blankets; nor would he let him go until threatened with a lawsuit, the doctor having declared that the sick man would die on the road. A certain newspaper cried shame on the great lords who suffered such a man to end so miserably; they hastened to leave their cards at his door. In the funeral procession two brothers of the king, dukes, earls, bishops, the first men in England, carried or followed the body. A singular contrast, picturing in abstract all his talent, and all his life: lords at his funeral, and bailiffs at his death-bed.

His theatre was in accordance; all was brilliant, but the metal was not all his own, nor was it of the best quality. His comedies were comedies of society, the most amusing ever written, but merely comedies of society. Imagine the exaggerated caricatures artists are wont to improvise, in a drawing-room where they are intimate, about eleven o'clock in the evening. His first play, *The Rivals*, and afterwards his *Duenna*, and *The Critic*, are loaded with these, and scarce anything else. There is Mrs Malaprop, a silly pretentious woman, who uses grand words higgledy-piggledy, delighted with herself, in 'a nice derangement of epitaphs' before her nouns, and declaring that her niece is 'as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile.' There is

Mr. Acres, who suddenly becomes a hero, gets engaged in a duel, and being led on the ground, calculates the effect of the balls, thinks of his will, burial, embalmment, and wishes he were at home. There is another in the person of a clumsy and cowardly servant, of an irascible and brawling father, of a sentimental and romantic young lady, of a touchy Irish duellist. All this jogs and jostles on, without much order, amid the surprises of a twofold plot, by aid of expedients and rencontres, without the full and regular government of a dominating idea. But in vain one perceives it is a patchwork; the high spirit carries off everything: we laugh heartily; every single scene has its facetious and rapid movement; we forget that the clumsy valet makes remarks as witty as Sheridan himself,[1] and that the irascible gentleman speaks as well as the most elegant of writers.[2] The playwright is also a man of letters; if, through mere animal and social spirit, he wished to amuse others and to amuse himself, he does not forget the interests of his talent and the care for his reputation. He has taste, he appreciates the refinements of style, the worth of a new image, of a striking contrast, of a witty and well-considered insinuation. He has, above all, wit, a wonderful conversational wit, the art of rousing and sustaining the attention, of being sharp, varied, of taking his hearers unawares, of throwing in a repartee, of setting folly in relief, of accumulating one after another witticisms and happy phrases. He brought himself to perfection subsequently to his first play, having acquired theatrical experience, writing and erasing; trying various scenes, recasting, arranging; his desire was that nothing should arrest the interest, no improbability shock the spectator; that his comedy might glide on with the precision, certainty, uniformity of a good machine. He invents jests, replaces them by better ones; he whets his jokes, binds them up like a sheaf of arrows, and writes at the bottom of the last page, 'Finished, thank God.—Amen.' He is right, for the work costs him some pains; he will not write a second. This kind of writing, artificial and condensed as the satires of La Bruyère, is like a cut phial, into which the author has distilled without reservation all his reflections, his reading, his understanding.

What is there in this celebrated *School for Scandal?* And what is there, that has cast upon English comedy, which day by day was being

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[1] *Acres.* Odds blades! David, no gentleman will ever risk the loss of his honour! *David.* I say, then, it would be but civil in honour never to risk the loss of a gentleman.—Look ye, master, this honour seems to me to be a marvellous false friend; ay, truly, a very courtier-like servant.—*The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, 1828: *The Rivals*, iv. 1.

[2] *Sir Anthony.*—Nay, but Jack, such eyes! so innocently wild! so bashfully irresolute! Not a glance but speaks and kindles some thought of love! Then, Jack, her cheeks! so deeply blushing at the insinuations of her tell-tale eyes! Then, Jack, her lips! O Jack, lips, smiling at their own discretion! and if not smiling, more sweetly pouting, more lovely in sullenness!—*The Rivals*, iii. 1.

more and more for- of , the radiance of a last success? Sheridan took two characters Fielding, Blifil, and Tom Jones; two plays of Molière, *Le Misanthrope* and *Tartufe;* and from these puissant materials, condensed with admirable cleverness, he has constructed the most brilliant firework imaginable. Molière has only one female slanderer, Célimène; the other characters serve only to give her a cue: there is quite enough of such a jeering woman; she rails on within certain bounds, without hurry, like a true queen of the drawing-room, who has time to converse, who knows that she is listened to, who listens to herself: she is a woman of society, who preserves the tone of refined conversation; and in order to smooth down the harshness, her slanders are interrupted by the calm reason and sensible discourse of the amiable Eliante. Molière represents the malice of the world without exaggeration; but here they are rather caricatured than depicted. 'Ladies, your servant,' says Sir Peter; 'mercy upon me! the whole set—a character dead at every sentence.'[1] In fact, they are ferocious: it is a regular quarry; they even befoul one another, to deepen the outrage. Mrs. Candour remarks: 'Yesterday Miss Prim assured me, that Mr. and Mrs. Honeymoon are now become mere man and wife, like the rest of their acquaintance. She likewise hinted, that a certain widow in the next street had got rid of her dropsy, and recovered her shape in a most surprising manner. . . . I was informed, too, that Lord Flimsy caught his wife at a house of no extraordinary fame; and that Tom Saunter and Sir Harry Idle were to measure swords on a similar occasion.'[2] Their animosity is so bitter that they descend to the part of buffoons. The most elegant person in the room, Lady Teazle, shows her teeth to ape a ridiculous lady, draws her mouth on one side, and makes faces. There is no pause, no softening; sarcasms fly like pistol-shots. The author had laid in a stock, he had to use them up. It is he speaking through the mouth of each of his characters; he gives them all the same wit, that is his own, his irony, his harshness, his picturesque vigour; whatever they are, clowns, fops, old women, girls, no matter, the author's main business is to break out into twenty explosions in a minute:

'*Mrs Candour.* Well, I will never join in the ridicule of a friend; so I tell my cousin Ogle, and ye all know what pretensions she has to beauty.

Crab. She has the oddest countenance—a collection of features from all the corners of the globe.

Sir Benjamin. She has, indeed, an Irish front.

Crab. Caledonian locks.

Sir B. Dutch nose.

Crab. Austrian lips.

Sir B. The complexion of a Spaniard.

Crab. And teeth *à la Chinoise.*

[1] *The School for Scandal*, ii. 2. [2] *Ibid.* i. 1.

Sir B. In short, her face resembles a *table d'hôte* [illegible] where no two guests are of a nation.

Crab. Or a congress at the close of a general war, where every member seems to have a different interest, and the nose and chin are the only parties likely to join issue.'[1]

Or again:

'*Crab.* Sad news upon his arrival, to hear how your brother has gone on!

Joseph Surface. I hope no busy people have already prejudiced his uncle against him—he may reform.

Sir Benjamin. True, he may; for my part, I never thought him so utterly void of principle as people say, and though he has lost all his friends, I am told nobody is better spoken of amongst the Jews.

Crab. Foregad, if the Old Jewry was a ward, Charles would be an alderman, for he pays as many annuities as the Irish Tontine; and when he is sick, they have prayers for his recovery in all the Synagogues.

Sir B. Yet no man lives in greater splendor.—They tell me, when he entertains his friends, he can sit down to dinner with a dozen of his own securities, have a score of tradesmen waiting in the anti-chamber, and an officer behind every guest's chair.'[2]

And again:

'*Sir B.* Mr. Surface, I did not mean to hurt you, but depend on't, your brother is utterly undone.

Crab. Oh! undone as ever man was—can't raise a guinea.

Sir B. Everything is sold, I am told, that was moveable.

Crab. Not a moveable left, except some old bottles and some pictures, and they seem to be framed in the wainscot, egad.

Sir B. I am sorry to hear also some bad stories of him.

Crab. Oh! he has done many mean things, that's certain.

Sir B. But, however, he's your brother.

Crab. Ay! as he is your brother—we'll tell you more another opportunity.'[3]

In this manner has he pointed, multiplied, thrust to the quick, the measured epigrams of Molière. And yet is it possible to grow weary of such a well-sustained discharge of malice and witticisms?

Observe also the change which the hypocrite undergoes under his treatment. Doubtless all the grandeur disappears from the part. Joseph Surface does not uphold, like Tartufe, the interest of the comedy; he does not possess, like his ancestor, the nature of a cabman, the boldness of a man of action, the manners of a beadle, the neck and shoulders of a monk. He is merely selfish and cautious; if he is engaged in an intrigue, it is rather against his will; he is only half-hearted in the matter, like a correct young man, well dressed, with a fair income, timorous and fastidious by nature, discreet in manners, and without violent passions; all about him is soft and polished, he takes his tone from the times, he makes no display of religion, though he does of morality; he is a man of measured speech, of lofty sentiments, a dis-

[1] *The School for Scandal*, ii. 2. [2] *Ibid.* i. 1. [3] *Ibid.*

ciple of Johnson or Rousseau, a dealer in set phrases. There is nothing on which to construct a drama in this commonplace person; and the fine situations which Sheridan takes from Molière lose half their force through depending on such pitiful support. But how this insufficiency is covered by the quickness, abundance, naturalness of the incidents! how skill makes up for everything! how it seems capable of supplying everything, even genius! how the spectator laughs to see Joseph caught in his sanctuary like a fox in his hole; obliged to hide the wife, then to conceal the husband; forced to run from one to the other; busy in hiding the one behind his screen, and the other in his closet; reduced in casting himself into his own snares, in justifying those whom he wished to ruin, the husband in the eyes of the wife, the nephew in the eyes of the uncle; to ruin the only man whom he wished to justify, namely, the precious and immaculate Joseph Surface; to turn out in the end ridiculous, odious, baffled, confounded, in spite of his adroitness, even by reason of his adroitness, step by step, without quarter or remedy; to sneak off, poor fox, with his tail between his legs, his skin spoiled, amid hootings and laughter! And how, at the same time, side by side with this, the naggings of Sir Peter and his wife, the suppers, songs, the picture sale at the spendthrift's house, weave a comedy in a comedy, and renew the interest by renewing the attention! We cease to think of the meagreness of the characters, as we cease to think of the variation from truth; we are willingly carried away by the vivacity of the action, dazzled by the brilliancy of the dialogue; we are charmed, applaud; admit that, after all, next to great inventive faculty, animation and wit are the most agreeable gifts in the world: we appreciate them in their season, and find that they also have their place in the literary banquet; and that if they are not worth as much as the substantial joints, the natural and generous wines of the first course, at least they furnish the dessert.

The dessert over, we must leave the table. After Sheridan, we leave it forthwith. Henceforth comedy languishes, fails; there is nothing left but farce, such as Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*, the burlesques of George Colman, a tutor, an old maid, countrymen and their dialect; caricature succeeds painting; Punch raises a laugh when the days of Reynolds and Gainsborough are over. There is nowhere in Europe, at the present time, a more barren stage; good company abandons it to the people. The form of society, and the spirit which had called it into being, have disappeared. Vivacity, and the subject of original conceptions, had peopled the stage of the Renaissance in England,—a surfeit which, unable to display itself in systematic argument, or to express itself in philosophical ideas, found its natural outlet only in mimic action and talking characters. The want of polished society had nourished the English comedy of the seventeenth century,—a society which, accustomed to the representations of the court and the displays of the world, sought on the stage the copy of its intercourse

and its drawing-rooms. With the decadence of the court and the check of mimic invention, the genuine drama and the genuine comedy disappeared; they passed from the stage into books. The reason of it is, that people no longer live in public, like the embroidered dukes of Louis XIV. and Charles II., but in their family, or at the study table; the novel replaces the theatre at the same time as citizen life replaces the life of the court.

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